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**The Virtual Wake in Brazil**

Martins Van Den Hurk, Andreia

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# The Virtual Wake in Brazil

Andréia Martins van den Hurk

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of Bath  
Department of Social and Policy Sciences

June 2018

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To my husband,  
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for giving me the gift of time.

## Abstract

In Brazil, as in most Western countries, management of the dead has become professionalized; funerals have become smaller, more private. Thus, death is removed from everyday life and hidden from society. Contemporary media and especially the Internet however, have the potential to relocate death and mourning back into a more public, or at least communal, space. The Brazilian virtual wake, which in certain circumstances any stranger can watch a 24 or 12-hour wake in real time via the Internet, represents a dramatic, technologically-enabled re-framing of public and private. Those who are watching the virtual wakes of strangers are mostly members of a Facebook group named *Profiles de Gente Morta*. Why are they doing so? Studying this phenomenon will contribute to an emerging global research field documenting and analysing how digital technology is changing the social landscape, not least the landscape of death. Online streaming of funerals and Internet memorial sites have been researched in various countries, but the virtual wake possibly only occurs in Brazil and has just started to be researched.

## Introduction

Images of death are a part of Brazil's quotidian: in 2016, the Ministry of Health (BOL, 2016) published a list of the main causes of death in the country: if health issues<sup>1</sup> are excluded, violence and traffic accidents become the top two. Though common, death by violence and traffic accidents are far from becoming uninteresting to the country's media; in fact, there are specialised TV programs and tabloids focused on reporting them (Ramos & Paiva, 2007)<sup>2</sup>. For this reason, Brazilians can be confronted with death imagery quite constantly, mostly through the press and, in the past decade, through websites, blogs and Social Network Sites (SNSs). Therefore, it is safe to affirm that, in general, Brazilians are quite exposed to death and dead bodies, but it is necessary to classify the exposure, even if only superficially.

This exposure can be either involuntary or voluntary. Involuntary exposure happens when witnessing a serious car accident, for example, or through images of similar accidents being presented on/in the news or on social media. Voluntary exposure can notably happen when the individual actively seeks images of death and dead bodies<sup>3</sup>. One of those voluntary ways, and the one in which this study is focused on, is related to a very specific death ritual.

This specific ritual is known as *velório*, what some English-speaking countries will sometimes refer to as 'wake'<sup>4</sup>, 'viewing' or 'funeral' (Walter, 2013). In Portuguese, *velório* stems from the word *vela*, meaning 'candle' (Reis, 2003), and refers to the candles which used to be lit in the room where the body was placed, in order to aid the deceased's soul in their journey to the afterlife, or to keep bad spirits away. The *velório* is a period of 12 to 24 hours in which the deceased's family and friends will gather around the body for a vigil, a ritual of goodbyes, prayers and comforting. The term viewing, commonly used by Americans, conveys a sense of quickness (even if this is not the case): a brief visit, in which one's own purpose is to view the body and go. This is not how

---

<sup>1</sup> The list contains twenty main causes of death in Brazil. Stroke (CVA), heart attacks, pneumonia and diabetes are the top four causes. The fifth is violence, hypertension is the sixth, and traffic accidents are the seventh. The data is from 2013, published in 2016.

<sup>2</sup> Popularly those tabloids are referred to as newspapers from which 'blood drips if you twist them', giving the number of graphic imageries they publish.

<sup>3</sup> For example, stopping or reducing speed in order to see, in more detail, the result of a car accident or taking pictures, recording videos of it to be shared on social media apps, such as WhatsApp.

<sup>4</sup> In this thesis, 'wake' is used as a synonym for *velório*.

Brazilians do it. In Brazil, it is a social event and will more likely be the first time an urban, middle-class individual will get to voluntarily see a real dead body. *Velórios* are held hours after death, after only part of the paperwork is taken care of.

Up to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, everyone in the deceased's community or neighbourhood was expected to attend and pay their respects. From the 20<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the *velório* became more private, intended for the deceased's family and closest friends, and to have children participating, for example, is now also a private, individual decision. But the so-called private aspect of Brazilian *velórios* nowadays does not exclude acquaintances or even strangers from participating in them.

As many Brazilians, the first time I saw a dead body was involuntarily, through a picture on a newspaper. I was a seven-year-old in December 1992, when a telenovela actress was brutally murdered by her on-screen partner and pictures of her lifeless body popped up in every news media. I remember being intrigued and scared by it, especially because the place where her body was found was quite close to where my family lived.

Almost two years later, an ascending football player died in a car crash, strangled by his seat belt, and I remember seeing his lifeless body on TV and in newspapers. Many murder cases and brutal accidents continued to happen while I was growing up, and I kept seeing images of death and dead bodies involuntarily. As I got older, however, I voluntarily looked for them a couple of times – and regretted it immensely<sup>5</sup>.

I was seventeen when I got to voluntarily see a dead body in front of me: it was during the *velório* of my paternal grandfather; his death was quite unexpected and I felt physically ill when I got the news. During his *velório* I could not bring myself to touch his hand as my grandmother was. I really wanted to, but I was afraid of how it would feel, of his temperature, of the texture of a dead hand. But I am glad I got to say goodbye to him in my own way, though unable to

---

<sup>5</sup> In 1996 a popular Brazilian band was killed in a plane crash and the images of their disfigured bodies were leaked and featured in tabloids, which made their way through the school where I used to study. Years later, I discovered that there were websites specialised in featuring photos and videos of dead bodies.



understand why, when we got back home after the burial, my father would not let me listen to music.

As he could not explain the reasons why music was not to be played at the time of a relative's death, and as I experienced in similar situations during and after *velórios* I attended later on, I could see that Brazilians may be frequently confronted with death and dead bodies, but that does not mean they fully understand their own death rituals. This thesis will attempt to make sense of the Brazilian way of death, in order to understand why Brazilians behave the way they do, especially in a *velório*, which is an extremely important funerary ritual in the country.

A *velório virtual* – or virtual wake<sup>6</sup> – is therefore the online broadcasting of an actual *velório*. This broadcasting is done by some *funerárias*<sup>7</sup>, by placing cameras in the rooms where actual wakes happen. It is a hired service, either for a fee or at no cost, depending on the place, and can be private or public. This private and/or public aspect of virtual wakes means that access can be either secured by passwords and logins or open to anyone accessing the *funerária*'s website. The basic reason for virtual wakes to exist is because *velórios* are very important rituals to Brazilians and thus, they would allow those who cannot attend the wake itself to do so, virtually. Wakes are the last opportunity to spend time with the body of a deceased loved one and, as aforementioned, can be the first opportunity for a Brazilian to voluntarily see a dead body.

The virtual wake, then, can also be understood as yet another opportunity to voluntarily see dead bodies; there are some who actively seek and watch openly broadcasted virtual wakes, but the most important aspect of it, to this work, is that some of these people watch the virtual wakes of complete strangers. In this thesis, these watchers are members of a group called *Perfil de Gente Morta* (PGM), or 'Dead People Profiles'<sup>8</sup>, founded on a social network site called Orkut, in 2004, which has been active on Facebook since 2012.

The group is this thesis' research field, and it is important to be studied because its main goal is to catalogue the profiles of deceased social media users,

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<sup>6</sup> The term 'virtual wake' was coined by me when I first started studying *velórios virtuais* in 2011 and needed to translate its name to English (Martins, 2013).

<sup>7</sup> Funeral Homes in Portuguese.

<sup>8</sup> Throughout this thesis, the group will be referred as *Profiles de Gente Morta*, PGM or 'Dead People Profiles', interchangeably.

like a real-time obituary (Martins, 2013). Through this cataloguing and the watching of virtual wakes, the group can be considered as a new space of human sociability, for debating matters of death and dying and discussing issues associated with them which are not always openly addressed in Brazil. The importance of the *velório* will be highlighted throughout this thesis, which aims to understand it in three settings:

- 1) How it was performed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century;
- 2) Which changes occurred at that time, allowing it to
- 3) Be transformed into a moment that can be broadcasted on the Internet, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, becoming the *velório virtual*/virtual wake.

To achieve this, Chapter 1 is dedicated to, first, looking into definitions of funerals and wakes in Death Encyclopaedias, and then explaining what comprises a funeral in Brazil. The chapter gives special attention to the wake, which is one of the three rituals performed in Brazilian funerals, while also highlighting similarities and disparities between the UK and the US and what they understand as a funeral/wake.

The first chapter also presents this thesis' contribution to academic knowledge: the identification of a gap in the literature concerning contemporary funerals in Brazil, which this work aims to fill, or at least to serve as a foundation for it to be developed. Death Studies as a whole is still an emerging research field in Brazil, as Brazil itself remains an understudied area outside Latin America. Therefore, this thesis can be seen as an important contribution to Death Studies by strengthening Brazil's presence in the field and by presenting the country to the Global North under a different light.

Chapter 2 is about how this research was conducted, presenting the adopted methodologies and stressing that this is mainly an anthropologic, qualitative, exploratory and inductive study, and therefore is highly descriptive, despite having polls and questionnaires as its main source of data. The following chapter is dedicated to funerals in 19<sup>th</sup> century Brazil, offering a historical context to the rituals included in it. The necessity in dedicating a whole chapter to this theme lies in the fact that, without understanding the way death was seen in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it may be difficult to grasp the reasons why Brazilians behave as they do now, and the reasons why virtual wakes exist in the first place. This is

why having a detailed description of the way funerals were carried out in the 19<sup>th</sup> century is key to this study, because it was a time of change which enabled current behaviours to be developed. The chapter concludes by briefly touching on the establishment of Brazilian death-ways during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, following the changes initiated in the 1800s.

The fourth chapter introduces the development of the Internet in Brazil, focusing on death-related uses, and finally presents the first part of the research field, the *Perfil de Gente Morta* group. This is the introduction to how the group worked on Orkut and its rules, providing a general profile of its members. This was achieved by the analysis of polls and a third-party questionnaire, which were collected during previous research (Martins, 2009; 2013).

Chapter 5 is about the *Profiles de Gente Morta* on Facebook, and it presents the changes which occurred after its move to the new social network site. It starts by providing a brief overview of the group on Facebook and its establishment in Brazil, followed by descriptions on how it now works. This particular section narrates my experience in the field both as a researcher and as a member of PGM's administrative team, constructed as a contribution to the debate on the limits of the online research field and its potential impact on the researcher. Information on Facebook-PGM members is presented through the analysis of a questionnaire specifically created for this research.

This thesis culminates with Chapter 6, dedicated to further explaining what virtual wakes are and why they were created, their practical applications in real life, and how PGM members understand them. The chapter also covers how virtual wakes are watched by members of the group, making comparisons between this activity during its permanence on Orkut and now on Facebook. Data on this behaviour is presented through one poll and ten questions from the specific questionnaire mentioned previously. This is followed by the final considerations regarding this research.

It is necessary to stress that the descriptive nature of this work is directly related to the chosen methodologies to carry it out. This detailed description, especially of the 'Dead People Profiles' group, both on Orkut and Facebook, is necessary to clarify how it operates and the environment it provides to its members in order to discuss matters of death and dying. PGM is, however, just a fraction, a small sample of Brazilian society, but in this thesis, it is understood

as a tool which can contribute to changing the way death is seen in the country. Therefore, this thesis' hypothesis is that PGM and its members are contributing to a gradual shift in the way death is dealt with in Brazil, which is strengthened by the technology of virtual wakes. Based on the activities carried out by members of this group, the research questions are:

- 1) What are the reasons for PGM members to watch virtual wakes of strangers?
- 2) Is the discussion of death-related issues in PGM enabling an offline re-approximation with death in urban Brazil?
- 3) Is it possible to interpret PGM members' behaviour as a reconstruction or a reconfiguration of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century behaviour towards death in Brazil?

Throughout the three settings, the presence of strangers will be highlighted. This is because, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, strangers were welcome in Brazilian funerals, only to gradually become unwelcome in the following century. In this work, the act of watching virtual wakes of strangers is seen as a means to empower people to discuss death and dying issues, and for strangers to participate in funerary rituals once more; though, this time, through online tools. Thus, they might be contributing to the development of Brazilians' relationship with death in a very similar way to what it was before changes were introduced in the 1800s.

## **Summary**

This introductory chapter has uncovered that, in Brazil, violence is a day-to-day occurrence, as are encounters with death and dead bodies, either voluntary or involuntarily. One form of voluntarily seeing dead bodies is attending wakes, either real or virtual ones. Virtual wakes and the environment in which they can be watched, via the *Profiles de Gente Morta* group, which is the research field in which this work was conducted, were also introduced.

Then, the three settings in which virtual wakes are explored in this thesis were determined, while also providing a breakdown of the chapters that compose this work. The hypothesis that served as a base for this research to be carried out was also laid out, as well as its research questions.

## Chapter 1: Literature Review

A traditional literature review is about presenting previous knowledge related to a specific subject upon which the foundation of a research project is built (Oliver, 2012). However, the subject of this thesis, the virtual wake in Brazil, is still quite underdeveloped. Therefore, this thesis' contribution to knowledge is the laying out of a literature foundation on real and virtual wakes in Brazil.

During this research, in order to construct its literature review, apart from acknowledging the scarcity of literature on the subject of real and virtual wakes, another problem was identified: the predominantly interchangeable use of the words 'funeral', 'viewing', 'visiting' and 'wake' in the literature produced by the UK and the US, which are leaders in the field. This can be confusing for researchers from other nationalities, and this confusion happens mostly because further explanations or descriptions of the rituals themselves, when offered, tend to be from the point of view of professionals in the funeral business.

Because of this confusion, this literature review aims to clarify what funerals are in Brazil, using the UK and the US as counterexamples. This clarification is necessary because these terminologies can be either non-existent or understood and employed differently in the aforementioned countries. The reasons why virtual wakes are named as such, and not as 'funeral webcasting' or other North American terms, will also be addressed.

But what is a funeral? Defining it can be a daunting task because English-speaking countries tend to use the word funeral as a global term for different rituals, wakes included, as if there is no differentiation between them. When it comes to funerals, the literature seems to be worried with what they are *for*, and not what they actually *are*. Similarities and/or disparities across areas of knowledge regarding the usefulness of funerals will not be developed here; this is because the interdisciplinary aspect of the purpose of funerals is not the intention of this literature review. However, there is a sociological perspective on the usefulness of funerals which this work stands by: "the main purpose of a funeral is to signify the event of a death. It marks that something valuable, a human life, has passed. Whatever else a funeral does or does not do, it must do this" (Grainger 1988, cited by Walter, 1990, p.111).

The global feature of funerals implicates that they are shaped and organised in a multitude of ways across cultures, religions and individuals, therefore acquiring multiple purposes. Since this chapter is proposing to determine how Brazilians understand funerals, it will adhere to Grainger and Walter's understanding of the *purpose* of a funeral.

Because this work is concentrated on virtual wakes in Brazil, it is important to, first, clarify what funerals are in order to touch the subject of wakes, online and offline. Therefore, to reach a proper definition of funerals and wakes, first, Death Encyclopaedias were consulted: *The Encyclopedia of Death and Dying* (Howarth & Leaman, 2001), *The Macmillan Encyclopaedia of Death and Dying* (Kastenbaum, 2003) and *The Encyclopaedia of Death and the Human Experience* (Bryant & Peck, 2009). They were referred to because they are the main encyclopaedias in the area of Death Studies.

After listing the definitions offered by encyclopaedias, a detailed description of how funerals are conducted in Brazil will be offered. It is important to highlight that this is a general description, and that different regions, cultures or religions in the country might have different ways of conducting their funerals.

When it comes to Brazil, description was drawn from my own experience, for, in 15 years, I have been to nine funerals myself. The reason for relying on my own experience is that literature on the subject is also scarce.

For the UK and the US, used as counterexamples, it was identified that the literature tends to focus on the work of funeral directors and their perspective. Therefore, their examples were drawn from a few works which offer clear and general accounts of how funerals are conducted in these countries, rather than highlighting or focusing on the experience of professionals in the funeral trade (Habenstein & Lamers, 1963; Harper, 2010; Bailey, 2012).

## **1 Funerals, According to Encyclopaedias**

The three encyclopaedias consulted for this work tended to either list the ways in which funerals can be carried out in diverse cultures or not reference them as an individual entry at all. In this sense, they were frustrating because there was no direct reference to the relation between funerals and wakes, as there should have been, as they are specialised publications.

In addition, when addressing funerals, none of the encyclopaedias mentions Brazil whatsoever, and they do not offer descriptions of how funerals are generally carried out in the UK or in the US. There is no Brazilian death encyclopaedia or literature which explains the country's understanding of funerals at the present time. Clarifications and descriptions can mainly be found, however, in works approaching funeral practices in a historical context (Cascudo, 2001; Reis, 2003; Vailati, 2010), or accounts from foreigners who visited the country in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Lindley, 1805; Barrow, 1806; Southey, 1810; Koster, 1816; Graham, 1824; Walsh, 1830; Kidder, 1845).

The lack of detailed descriptions in specialised encyclopaedias for such a basic theme in death studies was an unforeseen discovery, for it reinforces the assumption that readers will automatically know what a funeral is, what it involves, how it is conducted, or that they will understand it in the same way. The encyclopaedias seem to be preoccupied in citing extreme or curious examples of funerals carried out by particular cultures, leaving conventions from the UK and the US aside, or to only explain specific topics related to funerals in either country. This is interesting because, as aforementioned, most of the literature on death is still published by the UK and the US, the consulted encyclopaedias included. If the intention of these publications in providing no detail on how funerals are generally conducted in these countries was to relay a sense of individuality, or that people are free to do as they please, then this should have been made clear.

*The Encyclopedia of Death and Dying* (Howarth & Leaman, 2001) alludes to several *functions* attributed to funerals throughout civilisations and times, stating that “their purpose is twofold: the disposal of the dead body and the social reintegration of the survivors” (p.199). The entry goes on to explain that in societies in which funerals are overseen by a professional – not mentioning, however, which societies these are, but the UK and the US are examples –, a funeral director<sup>9</sup>, responsible for “dramatising the rites” (*idem*), will help in reintegrating and re-establishing the bereaved, maintaining a sense of family hierarchy which will be reflected in the way people are seated or in the order funeral vehicles leave the funeral home. A result of this, noted by the authors,

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<sup>9</sup> Sometimes referred to as undertaker (an outdated term), mortician or funeral celebrant, the latter being responsible only for arranging and presiding the ceremonial part of the funeral, not being involved in transporting or taking care of the body, for example.

can be a sense of exclusion or lack of recognition by other mourners, like girlfriends or boyfriends, for example, and is a potential source of distress.

*The Encyclopedia of Death & the Human Experience* (Bryant & Peck, 2009) does not have an entry for funeral. The first entry on the theme is “funeral conveyances”, followed by “funeral director”, “funeral home”, “funeral industry”, “funeral industry, unethical practices” and “funeral music”. While explaining funeral directorship, however, it offers an indication of the profession’s most common duties, from transporting and caring for the body to conducting the funeral ceremony (with no indication of the body being present at this ceremony or not, or what constitutes the funeral ceremony).

When explaining the development of the funeral trade through the increasing popularity of embalming techniques, it implies, nevertheless, that viewings or wakes are (or were, in the case of wakes) part of funeral rituals by referring to homes becoming smaller with the passing of time. This, according to Bryant & Peck (2009), made such rituals more complicated and impractical to be held there, so funeral homes filled this gap, providing sufficient space for mourners to congregate. In this excerpt, the focus is on the shift in how funerals were conducted, which gave funeral directors more power over their trade, allowing them to be more than just a “mere supplier of equipment” (Bryant & Peck, 2009, p.469).

Other entries mention funerals on several occasions, characterising them as a “performance”, “ritual bricolage” and “authentic, personalized ceremonies” (Bryant & Peck, 2009, p.469-470) to name a few, and while a brief portrayal of the main features of a funeral home is offered, a general description of what constitutes a funeral is never offered.

*The Macmillan Encyclopedia of Death and Dying* (Kastenbaum, 2003) does not have an entry totally dedicated to funerals either; the first topic is “Funeral Industry”, followed by “Funeral orations and sermons”. The “Funeral Industry” entry starts by placing its emergence in the US as a result of the Civil War, therefore setting the tone of the entry to be based on and/or related to practices of the US. It emphasises the growth of undertaking as a profession through the development of embalming techniques, which became more acceptable to the public because of its desire to “ensure that, no matter what, they could have a



last look at their loved ones” (Kastenbaum, 2003, p.298), and its rising popularity contributing to the emergence of funeral homes.

This definition of the purpose of embalming, however, provided more questions than answers, for it does not elaborate on when this “last look” would happen, if it is/was attached to or enabled by a sort of ceremony or ritual. Would this be a viewing or visitation? Or a wake?

Mentions are made to the criticism suffered by the funeral industry during the 1960’s and 70’s, mostly referring to the price of funerals; by doing so, it unexpectedly offers a quick and superficial definition of the traditional American funeral: “an embalmed body, cosmetic touches, an open casket, and a last viewing by mourners” (Kastenbaum, 2003, p.300). The discussion which arose from those criticisms, strengthened by Jessica Mitford’s book (1963), offered the funeral industry a chance to explain their trade:

On the one hand, members of the industry asserted that the last look provided the bereaved with an undeniable message that death has occurred. On the other hand, gazing at the sacred remains initiated a much longer process of healing because it offered those in grief a lasting image or “memory picture” that erased many of the negative images coming to be associated with dying (i.e. being hooked up to tubes and wires in an impersonal, antiseptic hospital setting or seeing cancer disfigure the body of a loved one) (Kastenbaum, 2003, pp.300-301).

Overall, what the entry suggests is that embalming, cosmetic procedures, and a viewing or “last look” in open caskets are the traditional way of funerals in the US. This still is not a description but offers more details than the previously analysed encyclopaedias. In the US, bodies started to be embalmed in order to allow them to travel to where the disposal would occur. Afterwards, the process became almost mandatory, for aesthetic reasons only, to preserve it in a sleep-like state for the viewing, as Walter (2013) has put it.

It is important to note that, in this entry, the encyclopaedia itself only refers to this stage as ‘viewing’, which gives the impression that the body is on display for a short period of time, or that its purpose is just to get a glimpse of the deceased, not spending time with them. This will be clarified later.

## 2 Wakes, According to Encyclopaedias

The wake is a ritual that is deeply rooted in the Roman-Catholic faith (Strange, 2010). Generally speaking, it is a ceremony with diverse purposes that ranged from, in the past, keeping the body free from insects and rodents, to protecting it from being robbed by body snatchers or even by spirits (Reis, 2003). In addition, the wake sometimes served to guard the body while attendees waited for the arrival of a distant relative. Prior to the introduction of embalming techniques, the wake was also for making sure the person was actually dead before proceeding to disposal. There cannot be a wake without a body.

This affirmation excludes extreme cases, such as those where a body cannot be found: if the person died at sea or from major catastrophes, for example. In these situations, there is a symbolic wake instead. When this affirmation is made, it refers to the use of the word 'wake' for determining similar rituals, such as viewings and funeral services, in situations where a body is available for the ritual to be performed but the ritual itself is not carried out, mainly because of cultural and/or social reasons.

Van Gennep (1960) classifies the wake as a period of margin belonging to a number of other rites of separation. He also explains that funerary rituals, as other aspects of life, are comprised of a triad, a structure that involves stages of isolation, marginality and reincorporation in order to enter a new state. What Van Gennep managed to point out, according to Metcalf and Huntington (1991), is that there are many similarities between alleged beginnings, margins, ends and its ritualistic purposes in society.

Furthermore, the wake can be understood as a platform where the link between individual and society is exposed: although the feeling of loss is intimate, it is shaped by social norms (Elias, 1993; 1994a; 1994b; Giddens, 1993 and Simmel, 2005). Moreover, the wake serves as an opportunity for peers, kin and community to acknowledge the deceased's role within the social structure. But what *is* a wake, after all?

When it comes to wakes, encyclopaedias offer richer clarifications and general accounts of what it entails, as opposed to the aforementioned characterisations of funerals. The entries on *The Encyclopedia of Death and Dying* (Howarth & Leaman, 2001) and *The Encyclopedia of Death & the Human*

*Experience* (Bryant & Peck, 2009) were both written by the same contributor, which granted the latter a sense of an expanded version of the first. But then, both entries can be considered as complementary.

As the *Encyclopedia of Death and Dying* (Howarth & Leaman, 2001) puts it, the wake is “a vigil or watch kept over a deceased person prior to burial” (p.472) and adds that various factors can contribute to its duration, depending on climate, religion and culture, for example. The entry goes on to address the “laying out of the deceased”, a practice that involves “washing, grooming and clothing” the body in order for it to be displayed (*idem*), mentioning that some cultures also provide them with shoes, a representation of their belief of the afterlife being a journey the deceased must now take on, and the placement of a rosary or a crucifix in their hand.

The body is placed on a receptacle – a bed, mat, coffin or similar, which is positioned in a way to “enable people to view it, pray, or, in former times, lament in its presence” (p.472). In Roman-Catholic tradition, the author explains, the body can be sprinkled with holy water and at least one candle is lit, a symbol of the *lux perpetua*, the perpetual light “to which the deceased is called” (*idem*). The description continues to mention that the wake is also to demonstrate that the deceased is not or was not left alone by their household, which “remained awake during the night” (p.473). The author points out the diversity of explanations for the custom, also referring to the range of ways in which it can be held, depending on circumstance and religion.

Offering of food and alcoholic drinks, the hosting of games and abuses committed by wake-goers in different localities is also cited, and the entry is concluded by stating that many modern, urban, Western societies no longer hold or even desire to hold wakes. The authors believe that, in these settings, death has become somehow anonymous, and its practices, private and voided of ritual. This, according to them, is leaving the bereaved with “feelings of guilt and anxiety” (Howarth & Leaman, 2001, p.474).

In the *Encyclopedia of Death & the Human Experience* (Bryant & Peck, 2009), the definition of wake is similar to the one in the *Encyclopedia of Death and Dying* (Howarth & Leaman, 2001): “a watch kept by the living over a deceased person before burial takes place” (Bryant & Peck, 2009, p.981). If this definition is compared to the previous one, burial is the only means of disposal

referred to by the author in connection to the wake. This can be understood as a suggestion that wakes are held, in general, only when burial is the form of disposal: burials are preferred by those of Catholic faith, the ones who tend to perform wakes in the first place. The entry continues to include that the wake, again in some Western societies, has become “a thing of the past”, while in others “it has been transformed into a family-centred, semiprivate event” (Bryant & Peck, 2009, p.981).

The authors go on to cite that, in the past, when death happened before baptism, birth (stillbirth) or as a cause of violence, the wake would then be a low-key situation which reflected the abnormal aspect of death. There is no indication of where this used to happen and the entry goes on to say that, nowadays, tragic deaths, especially of young people, can be marked by elaborate, public rituals.

When describing the process of preparing the body for display, the ritualistic part of washing and grooming is emphasised, with mentions to cleansing sequence and orientation, colours of garments and disposal of the materials used in the ritual. This entry also offers more details on the practice of lamentation, usually performed by skilled women, by highlighting the key moments in which this sometimes obligatory, cathartic, ritualised expression of emotion would occur: the beginning of the wake, the arrival of family and friends, the closing of the coffin and its removal, followed by the departure of the cortège to the place of burial. The conclusion is that modern embalming techniques are enabling mourners to hold wakes in their own homes once again, which is “increasingly seen as a more meaningful way of dealing with the crisis of death” (Bryant & Peck, 2009, p.984).

For the Macmillan Encyclopedia of Death and Dying (Kastenbaum, 2003), a wake is a low-key social gathering around the deceased with the purpose to mark one’s death as an event affecting a group of people, an occasion for private grief. But the entry also states that wakes are “held in connection with funerals. These sometimes involve keeping watch beside the corpse and behaving in a demonstrative way, either by lamenting or merry-making” (p.921):

The word [wake] primarily means, of course, to prevent someone from sleeping, to wake the person up, to disturb the person's slumber and make it impossible for him or her to slip back into it. [...] From this point of view, then, "waking the dead" is carried out mainly for the benefit of the dead themselves, in order to restore

them to wakefulness. To be the expression of a consciously focused intention on the part of the living is its ritual function. Not merely to give a dead person "a good send off," but to keep the dead properly moving in the right direction, instead of simply losing consciousness. In religious terms this means making sure that the person goes on living in the dimension of being he or she must now enter upon. In other words, the deceased must be awake among the dead, a state of affairs that is held to be beneficial to the deceased's survivors as well (*idem*).

When offering more details, the entry states that wakes are, from an anthropological perspective, a way to proclaim death, instead of disguising or opposing it, for "the wake overcomes human defences by demonstrating the provisional nature of life" (p.922). Therefore, the wake is a public demonstration of the chaos that has now overcome the shattered lives of the mourners, for their "world has been radically and permanently changed" (p.923).

As communal expressions of death-related emotions have become rarer or more private in countries influenced by contemporary Western behaviour, the entry continues, the seemingly gradual exclusion of wakes from funeral rituals "must be regarded as a deprivation" (p.924), and that other ways to express these emotions must now be found. The way this entry is constructed could make one think that viewings and visitations have now substituted for wakes, as quicker and somewhat modified versions of it. Many things could have been lost in this substitution, the contact with the deceased being the main one.

But as Kastenbaum puts it, the wake is something "easier to define than to explain" (p. 922), which is another reason why including a description of what configures funerals in Brazil is important to this work. This is what is going to be addressed now, with emphasis on viewings, visitations and wakes – or lack thereof.

### **3 Funerals in Brazil**

Brazilians understand funerals as a series of rituals performed after death. They are a triad: *velório* (or wake), *cortejo* (or cortège, funeral procession) and disposal. Funerals not only include, but culminate with burial or cremation, the main forms of disposal in the country; however, 95% of Brazilians are buried and cremation has only gained space in the past twenty years or so (Lewgoy, 2016).

This is what is referred to when regarding Brazilian funerals in this thesis: an unbreakable triad. In addition, in daily life, Brazilians understand the rituals as

a means to “signify the event of a death”, as proposed by Walter (1990, p.111). As aforementioned, these rituals are organised as a triad, and there cannot be one without the other. They happen in immediate sequence, starting as soon as possible after death, culminating with disposal.

Disposal marks the end of the Brazilian funeral. In the UK and in the US, they are not performed in sequence: sometimes, viewings (their variants of wakes) and cortèges are not even performed at all. These are some of the main things to be clarified in this chapter.

Because of this, the description provided here is lengthy, for it aims to clarify what Brazilian funerals are, while highlighting differences between them and the rituals performed in the UK and the US. Also, because literature on Brazilian funerary customs have focused on the practices from the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Reis, 2003; Rodrigues; 2006; Vailati, 2010) and on how Brazilians experience loss and grief (Koury, 2001; 2003), this section is mainly based on personal experience and contributes to the scarcity of literature on contemporary funerals in the country.

However, it is important to stress that Brazil has such a vast territory, with countless cultural influences, backgrounds and practices, and this description should not be understood as the only one for Brazilian funerals. This description mainly relates to large, densely populated urban areas of the country and is not about specific ethnic or religious groups, cultures or communities.

#### **4 A General Description of Brazilian Funerals**

If one remembers that the most common causes of death in Brazil, apart from health-related ones, are violence and traffic accidents, as briefly addressed in the Introduction to this thesis, it is imperative that, before any ritual can be arranged, a medical certificate is obtained. They are issued by the Brazilian public agency responsible for carrying out legal exams and providing medical certificates in extraordinary circumstances, the *Instituto Médico Legal* (Institute of Legal Medicine), popularly known by its initials, IML.

The IML classifies violent deaths as those occurring by traffic or occupational accidents, homicides and suicides, deaths in suspicious circumstances or natural deaths of unidentified individuals (SSP, n.d.). In all of

those cases, a necropsy<sup>10</sup> is legally compulsory, and the time needed for it to be carried out and for the body to be released will depend on its workload<sup>11</sup>. This does not mean that the examination will always be a very complex and time-consuming one. The 162<sup>nd</sup> article of the Brazilian Criminal Procedure Code states that:

The autopsy will be carried out at least six hours after death, unless the experts, on the evidence of death signs, judge that it can be done before that deadline, which they will declare in their report.

Single paragraph. In cases of violent death, a simple external examination of the body will suffice, when there is no criminal infraction to be determined, or when external injuries allow the cause of death to be specified and there is no need for internal examination to verify any relevant circumstance (Código de Processo Penal, 1941).

The expedition of a medical certificate in metropolises such as São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, however, can take longer than expected. It can take less time in smaller cities, but exactly how long is very difficult to determine in either case. However, one day seems to be the average. One of the most important features of funerals in Britain, when compared to Brazil, is that they can happen from days to weeks after death. The UK government website states that, after death, a medical certificate must be obtained and, before planning for a funeral, death must be registered. Only then the documents needed for the funeral will be issued. This registration needs to happen within five days (eight in Scotland) of death (Gov.uk, n.d.), but this does not mean the funeral will happen as soon as the documents are in hand: it can be ‘postponed’ for up to two weeks (Morell & Smith, 2007, p.8).

This ‘waiting period’ in the UK stresses the possibility of having time to process and plan things, like sending invitations and cards to inform people about the funeral. Yet another advantage of this period between death and disposal is the possibility to get “value for money”, by “shopping around” and getting quotes from different funeral directors (idem).

Bailey (2012) explains that funeral announcements in the UK are generally placed in newspapers, detailing the “deceased’s person’s name and date of

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<sup>10</sup> Vulgarly known as autopsy.

<sup>11</sup> The IML is a public agency, linked to the Secretary of Public Security, therefore present in each and every Brazilian state.

death, and usually their age". Other information included in this announcement relates to those "left behind", and if "flowers and donations are welcome" (p. 88), as well possible dress code requests and "details of the tea following the funeral" (*idem*).

This announcement can also either include or exclude "others in the community" (Bailey, 2012, p.88), which, according to the author, is for establishing the funeral's level of privacy; this level of privacy is thus directly stated, rather than interpreted, as it is the case in Brazil. For a Brazilian, this measure would seem more excluding than anything else.

As aforementioned, wakes are the first rituals to be performed in the Brazilian funeral triad. Generally, wakes are held from 12 to 24 hours after death, depending on the family's wishes. This is normally done to ensure attendance from distant relatives or from those who are not able to travel immediately. One measure that can be adopted to ensure attendance in UK funerals, for example, is delaying the funeral itself, therefore giving people more time to make travel and work arrangements. The dead can wait. A similar approach is adopted in the US.

However, in Brazil, a burial must happen within 36 hours of death, without preservative interventions to the body. Extraordinary cases (like epidemics, for example) are exceptional. Despite its predominantly tropical temperatures, the weather is not a contributing factor in the disposal time-frame in Brazil, or at least there was no literature that would confirm or deny this.

Since disposal is to take place up to 36 hours after death, the duration of wakes is dependent on the length of time a body is kept by the IML for verification. If this proves to take longer than expected, then preserving techniques must be adopted to allow the wake to happen at a later time. In the case of delays, however, those connected to the deceased will already be aware that death has happened and that a wake is to be held as soon as possible. A death certificate is, most of the time, granted after the body is disposed of.

A wake can be carried out right after obtaining the medical certificate and before obtaining a death certificate (Guia de Direitos, n.d.). This could be the main aspect that enables Brazilians to arrange their funerals so soon after death, as they need to take care of only part of the bureaucracy in order for rituals to start. The same is not possible in the UK, as aforementioned. In the US, there seems to be even more paperwork to go through. Habenstein & Lamers (1963)



provide a very detailed insight into American funerals, describing the way in which they are generally organised in the country. They offer a “dominant profile” (p.729) of US customs.

When a death occurs in the US, the first action is choosing the funeral director, whose first duty will be to remove the body from its place of death. A death certificate, which in some situations must also be signed by the funeral director, is required for this removal; sometimes, an additional permit for the removal is also mandatory. Permits are also needed for burial, and a special one for cremation; however, it is not clear if this permit is the same which is sometimes required for the Funeral Director to remove the body from its place of death. The authors also refer to the possibility of needing different permits for embalming before cremation, or for shipping a body across state lines, or even within the same state. These give the impression that funerals in the US have the potential to be more bureaucratic than in Brazil or in the UK.

But in Brazil, as soon as the medical certificate is issued, the first step is getting in touch with the *funerária* to arrange the transportation of the body to the funerária, where it will be prepared, and the wake, to be held. Sometimes, even before this, not just the family and close friends, but also acquaintances will be informed of the death, either by phone or social media. Cards or invitations are not used at all. This is a case of one telling the other, word of mouth spreading the news quite quickly, and people will already expect to know the time and place of the *velório* at the same time they are informed of a death. It is widely understood that this information will be immediately available, or become available fairly soon, and the wake, the first ritual in the funeral triad, will start in a matter of hours.

Those responsible for dealing with the funeral home will agree on how the body is to be treated, e.g. the use of cosmetics and other preservation techniques, the clothes and shoes in which the deceased will be dressed, the coffin (caskets are practically unheard of) and the time and place of the wake. There are also funeral homes which offer clothes for hire. Normally, only one person takes the lead in arranging these matters.

The *Encyclopedia of Death & the Human Experience* (Bryant & Peck, 2009) and *The Macmillan Encyclopaedia of Death and Dying* (Kastenbaum, 2003) linked the expansion of the funeral trade in the US to the development of

embalming techniques. But embalming in Brazil *only* happens when a necropsy by the IML is necessary and if it takes longer than normal for the body to be released. Other circumstances for embalming are cases of needing to transport the body for long distances (which is understandable, considering the size of Brazil) or if a *velório* of more than 24 hours of duration is necessary (ANVISA, 2007)<sup>12</sup>; otherwise, those related to the deceased are the ones who must travel in order to see the body for the last time, one of the reasons why Brazilian wakes can last for up to 24 hours.

Contemporary Brazilian wakes can be either communal or private, where relatives, friends and acquaintances of the deceased or their family are welcome. The privacy level depends mostly on the family, and, most importantly, on the deceased's place in society. Of course, public figures will have public wakes. But for those out of the public eye, wake attendance is governed by the kind of relationship with either the deceased or their family. In small towns, especially in the countryside, the wake can be understood as a public moment, but this is only because in close-knit Brazilian communities or neighbourhoods everyone knows everyone.

In metropolises, the wake is understood as more of a private moment and is almost exclusively meant for family and friends. The notion of a stranger being present at a wake is unusual because the kind of social interaction in Brazilian metropolises differ from small cities: in centres like São Paulo, for instance, it is possible to not even know one's own neighbours. In this case, a stranger is someone who does not have any relationship with the deceased or their family whatsoever. In both cases, the wake is, at the same time, informal and formal, secular and religious.

Privacy issues aside, in Brazil, the *velório* is imperative. To not have one is far from ideal, unless the deceased actively expressed that desire, which is still considered quite odd. It is definitely not "a thing of the past", but it can be understood as a "family-centred, semiprivate event", as defined by Bryant & Peck (2009, p.981).

A strong example of the importance of a wake for Brazilians can be found in the case of a family who was murdered in Spain in September 2016: a couple

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<sup>12</sup> Though very uncommon.

and their two children were killed by their nephew (Embury-Denis 2016). Because of the circumstances of their deaths, their bodies had to be cremated, and were only received by the family in Brazil in January 2017. Upon the arrival of their remains, the four urns were placed inside the same coffin and a wake was held (G1, 2017). The following afternoon, the urns were buried, still inside the same coffin, in a local cemetery (G1, 2017). Having a wake for ashes instead of bodies was considered strange by the public, but it shows the importance of the ritual, especially in such tragic circumstances. Kastenbaum (2003) and Bryant & Peck (2009) use the expression “low-key” repeatedly to refer to wakes, especially in tragic circumstances. But what is low-key? This is an unanswerable question.

Shoes are provided, ritualistically, as presented by Howarth & Leaman (2001), that the deceased must now undertake a journey to the afterlife. In Nancy Scheper-Hughes’ (1992) work on north-eastern Brazilian women enduring harsh, poor conditions of survival and dealing with the constant loss of their children, there is a passage where a toddler, Mercea, died of pneumonia and was buried barefoot. When one of the toddler’s sisters, Xoxa, who was away, learns about her young sibling’s fate of being buried with nothing to cover her feet, she becomes very distressed and for weeks is awoken by apparitions of Mercea, who was “hovering over her cot and pointing out to her bare feet” (p.501).

The remedy, in this case, to appease Mercea’s spirit, was to buy her stockings. In the book, there is a photo of Xoxa offering the stockings at the cemetery where her sister was buried with a subtitle that reads, “Mercea, may these stockings cover your bare feet and allow you to complete your journey, amen” (p. 503). As strong as this example is, this symbology of shoes aiding the dead in their journey seems to be currently lost, and is now an automated behaviour, in the sense that shoes are part of a complete attire and contribute to a dignified presentation of the deceased during the wake.

As for selecting a coffin at the funeral home, in most cases, there are generally three or four different ‘combos’ to choose from, and they will determine, by price range, which kind of coffin can be used (differentiated mainly by their material and type of accessories). Caskets are not at all popular, and, if available, are much more expensive than normal coffins. A coffin is shaped in a way that resembles a body: narrow in the part which corresponds to the head, wider in the torso and narrowing again in the part that corresponds to the legs. The lid is flat

and not hinged to the rest of the coffin, and sometimes has a small glass, a window-like feature to allow the deceased's face to remain visible even when it is closed.

When addressing caskets, Habenstein & Lamers (1963) immediately tie them to funeral costs in US funerals<sup>13</sup>, and this price can be combined in 'combos', in a similar way as it is done in Brazil. Caskets, as explained by the authors, are generally divided into three groups:

The full-couch, which permits the entire body to be viewed; the half-couch, which shows the body from the waist up, with the panel and moulding lifting on hinges, so as to be at right angle with the casket proper; and the hinge-cap, which is the same as half-couch, differing only in the fact that the panel, not the moulding, is on hinges. The half-couch is the variety most used today<sup>14</sup> (p.738).

The way in which the different types of caskets are named in the US can tell a lot about the American behaviour towards death. This agrees with the authors' statement that death is generally seen as a failure in the country. To refer to caskets as couches indicates a euphemism for death, which is strengthened by the way in which they are decorated, with padded interiors, resembling not only an actual couch, but a bed.

Popularly, Brazilians refer to death in many ways, some even funny or disrespectful, depending on the situation. But when talking about it respectfully, they do not use euphemisms. They use '*falecer*' or '*morrer*', synonym verbs for dying. It is also important to note that caskets are rectangular in shape, similar to a box, with a generally curved lid, which is said to prevent stacking.

In Brazil, flowers, and the way they will be arranged, are also included in the 'combos' offered by the funeral home. These flowers are normally arranged as wreaths, what Brazilians call *coroa de flores*<sup>15</sup>, symbols of affection and the status of the deceased. Loose flowers are also placed inside the coffin as well, around the body, which can be related to the fact that caskets are so uncommon, with their padded, silk-lined interiors, resembling a bed. Brazilian coffins are not finished with the same, seemingly lavish details as caskets, so flowers become

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<sup>13</sup> The authors claim funeral costs normally depend on four factors: funeral establishment facilities, staff services, other operational costs and expenses, and the value of the casket.

<sup>14</sup> There are also mentions to the most common types of caskets used in different parts of the US.

<sup>15</sup> Literally translated as "flower crowns".

the decoration, with the practical potential to fill gaps between the body and the inside of the coffin itself.

In addition, flowers are sometimes used to disguise signs of a traumatic death (such as the result of a car accident or a serious disease), literally covering the deceased's body with them, sometimes leaving only their faces exposed. The difference between coffins and caskets and their possible relation to flowers is that a coffin exposes the body completely, when open. A casket can be arranged in a way that only the top part of the body can be in view, if so desired. Maybe this is one of the reasons why countries which use caskets, such as the US, tend to have less flowers placed inside them.

In Brazil, the way in which flowers are presented has little variation. They generally use circular wreaths<sup>16</sup>, which represent the infinite and the circle of life. These circular wreaths are different from those common in Europe; European funeral wreaths are similar to Christmas decorations<sup>17</sup>. In Brazil, these wreaths are filled with flowers, making them closer to a disc, or to an oval shape. In addition, Brazilians pay a lot of attention to the meaning attached to each flower, which are quite diverse. Cards do not accompany the flowers, as in the UK; normally, a wide ribbon is placed across the wreath and a simple, concise message is written on it. This message can be directed to the deceased or to their family, or both.

Flowers in UK funerals, either for decoration or showing signs of affection and appreciation, are generally accompanied by cards, which can be displayed alongside them. This display, however, is organised in an altogether different room from the one where the viewing or the funeral service happens. According to Bailey's (2012) work, it seems like only one flower arrangement adorns the coffin, during the funeral service, which could signal that the coffin is closed and this tribute is placed on top of its lid. Other flower arrangements are sometimes mounted in foam, shaped as words, like 'Dad' or 'Mum', or as hearts, stars, or many other shapes.

But Bailey (2012) introduces an interesting way for funeral flowers to be used in the UK, which is their distribution to those visiting the deceased's home.

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<sup>16</sup> Heart-shaped wreaths are also used.

<sup>17</sup> The first time I saw such European funeral wreaths I was confused, thinking they were indeed Christmas decorations.

But because of the high cost attached to these flowers, the author states that they can also be donated to “care homes and hospices, often those which have cared for the deceased person before death” (Walter, 1996b; cited by Bailey, 2012, p.91). However, those recipients are highly likely to disassemble such arrangements, so “their provenance is undetectable” (Bailey, 2012, p. 92).

Even with that disassembling measure, or if gifted as a sign of appreciation by the deceased’s family after the funeral has taken place, it is highly unlikely that Brazilians, being as superstitious as they are, would agree to funeral flowers being reused in different contexts. They continue to be funeral flowers, even if arranged in vases, as Bailey (2012) suggests, and their symbolic value as such does not change that easily. However, the use of flowers in UK funerals seems to be optional and depending on the family’s wishes. In place of them, some ask for a donation to be made to a charity instead.

For the Brazilian *velório*, after the body is prepared, dressed and placed inside the coffin adorned with flowers, it will then be transported to the space where the ritual is to be held. Most *funerárias* have a dedicated space for holding wakes, which can be just a room – a *sala de velório* – or a series of rooms, which then becomes a *central de velórios*<sup>18</sup> (wake centre), where several wakes can be held concurrently<sup>19</sup>. The name of the deceased is displayed in the entrance to these rooms to avoid confusion. In most wake centres, wake rooms do not have doors. These rooms are sparingly decorated, generally displaying a crucifix and four stands with candle-shaped lamps, which will surround the coffin.

As mentioned in the Introduction to this thesis, the name *velório* derives from *vela*, which is the name for candle in Portuguese (Reis, 2003). During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, candles were abundant in wakes, not just as a symbol of the perpetual light, as suggested by Howarth & Leaman (2001), but also to denote wealth; in fact, the poor also went to funerals of wealthier individuals in order to get a free candle, which they would later use to light their homes (Reis, 2003). The symbolical use of candles will be further addressed in Chapter 3. Nowadays, however, candles are no longer used, but candle-shaped electric lamps have replaced them. Flower wreaths complete the decoration of the wake room.

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<sup>18</sup> The centres are normally located in the grounds of the funeral home or at the cemetery itself.

<sup>19</sup> By several I mean at least five.

Once the body is displayed – only in extreme situations the coffin is closed, which can be a source of great distress for the bereaved – the wake can start. Since embalming is not popular, it is common to hear mourners say they do not want to see their loved one in the coffin, exactly because cosmetic interventions are generally minimal, done for the body to look presentable but definitely dead, in the same way as defined by Walter (1991); therefore, the body might not resemble the deceased's self while alive, though efforts are made to achieve this. Mourners sometimes say they do not want that last “memory picture” (Kastenbaum, 2003, p.300-301) to be hurtful, reminding them of how their loved one died, which, unfortunately in Brazil, is statistically more likely to be tragic.

Close family members are normally the first ones to arrive. There is no dress code for wakes in Brazil, though some people still choose to wear black clothes. It is not common for families to request the use of particularly coloured clothes, since the wake starts so quickly after death that these requests are impractical. Also, there is no certainty that attendees will own clothes in a particular colour, or that they will have the time to arrange some, if necessary (Martins, 2018). The dress code is dependent on common-sense.

The family or those closest to the deceased will very likely sit or stand closely to the coffin, accompanied by the flower wreaths which continue to be delivered. The duration of the wake depends on the family's wishes alone, as long as it remains within the law regarding the timeframe for disposal, as aforementioned.

The standard length for a wake varies from twelve to twenty-four hours. One of the reasons for the wake to be lengthy is the need for people to plan to be absent from work and other responsibilities, or to wait for relatives to arrive; considering the size of Brazilian cities, the journey can take hours, even if the relatives in question live in the same city, which can be the case in São Paulo, for example. During the wake, the coffin is placed in the middle of the wake room, supported by pedestals, with the flower tributes arranged around the room, or at one end of it. People literally gather around it, mainly standing. Generally, seating is limited, and most of the time there are not enough chairs for everyone to sit.

At Brazilian wakes, there is no director or ranking, as mentioned by *The Encyclopedia of Death and Dying* (Howarth & Leaman, 2001) in their entry on funerals. Those closest to the deceased, however, may be constantly near the

coffin, and will naturally be those closest to the grave in the case of a burial, but there is no one to say where people should stay, sit, or a hierarchical identification of their relationship to the deceased. People take turns to interact with the deceased if they so desire or will be mainly talking to each other.

By referring that funeral directors, without presiding over funerals, would be just suppliers of equipment, Bryant & Peck (2009) have defined what funeral directors are in Brazil. However, this is not what they are called in the country. They can be defined, thus, more as salespeople than funeral directors as the UK and the US understands them to be.

Walter (2013) explains that, in the UK, wakes are generally known as private viewings, a moment of communion and “community avoidance” where the body might or might not be embalmed (p.2). Until the early 20th century, the body was placed in the family home’s front parlour and access to it was restricted to family and close friends; nowadays, performing the viewing is more a matter of choice than tradition, but it remains strictly private. The use of the word ‘viewing’ seems to indicate that this ritual is not a wake and should not be classified as such. With the possibility of choice, this viewing can be practically unheard of in contemporary Britain, still according to Walter (2013).

In her article on viewing practices in the UK and the US, Harper (2010) describes how a viewing is conducted at a specific funeral home in the UK. She explains that the possibility of viewing is not openly advertised in the death notices published in newspapers, so whomever wishes to view the deceased must call the funeral home to request it. This viewing period would conform to the funeral home’s working hours. The deceased are placed in a “chapel of rest”, accommodated inside their coffins, and there they stay “for the entirety of the day preceding, and up to the point at which the cortège departed for, the funeral” (Harper, 2010, p.112). This is a practice that happened, at least in that particular funeral home, independently of the coffin being open or closed or if viewing would be performed at all. Harper so describes how the viewing would take place, explaining that, once at the funeral home, the mourner would be

asked to wait in the reception area while the chapel of rest was checked. If the coffin was not yet in a chapel it was wheeled into one that was available. The lid was removed and propped in the corner. The body was checked and generally tidied (clothing straightened, head straightened, arms positioned) for



presentation. The chapel light was switched on and a candle was lit. The door was left open, and the staff member insured that other occupied chapel doors were shut. The staff member then invited the mourner to follow them through to the chapel and, once guided to the correct chapel, left them there. The mourner usually remained there between 5 and 15 minutes, sometimes with the door open, sometimes closed. When the mourner returned to the reception, a staff member would speak to them prior to their departure; often the mourner, if they were responsible for the funeral arrangements, would have questions or points to raise. They might also comment on the body's appearance (Harper, 2010, p. 112).

This description indicates that the viewing experience in the UK could be understood as a lonely one, and of very short duration. This could be sufficient to say that viewings are personal, individual experiences, rather than communal, shared experiences as wakes are, especially in Brazil. This is one more separating point between those two rituals and offers yet another reason for them not to be called by the same name.

Habenstein & Lamers (1963) refer to the typical American funeral as a period of three days, which begins with the removal of the body from the place of death and ends with disposal. One of the rituals that is included in this period, and which is the most interesting for the subject of this thesis, is the viewing. A viewing, in the US, is also entirely optional, as it is in the UK; however, since embalming is so common, the preparation for the viewing will happen at the same time as embalming is taking place. A licensed embalmer will prepare the body in such a way as to “mitigate the shock of death to the grieving viewer”, so it can be placed “in state” (p.739).

This placing the body “in state” could be understood as similar to the wake, but in reality, it is simply a viewing, as the name suggests, and it should be called so. In the US, it is a moment of social interaction, vigil, for paying respect to the deceased and offering support to the bereaved. The way it is called varies from state to state (Walter, 2013) and can also be known as a public visitation. The period for viewing is, most of the time, determined by the funeral home's working hours, if this ritual takes place there, as it normally does. Those connected to the deceased will then visit the body at the funeral home, generally during the afternoon and evening prior to the funeral service.

Habenstein & Lamers (1963) mention that it is common for the viewing to be the ritual which more people attend, contrary to the UK. It seems that viewing

is not a continuous period of time, like the Brazilian wake; and since it is common for more people to prefer the viewing over the funeral service, it appears that the viewing is between the deceased and their mourners, almost individually, not completely including, nor excluding, the deceased's family in this interaction, like in Brazil. Interaction between other mourners and the deceased's family seems to be reserved for after the funeral service takes place.

Sheila Harper (2010) offered a detailed description on how viewings are conducted in the US; her paper, however, concentrated in a particular funeral home, so her portrayal is very specific. On the other hand, it offers some details which seem to be overlooked by the overall majority of the literature focused on funerals and not on funeral directors. She explains that a viewing happens in a viewing room, specifically and sparingly decorated so the "casketed body" is the "focal point" (Harper, 2010, p.104). Chairs are arranged in rows, all facing the casket, which has drapes as a backdrop. Lamps, overhead spotlights and flowers, along with a single candle, complete the general arrangement, framing the casket.

Harper (2010) reinforces the aspect of convenience of these viewings by referring to them happening during a set timeframe, within a period of one to two days. This period can be longer, but this would increase the fees for hiring the viewing room, therefore increasing the cost of the funeral altogether. Viewing times are, most of the time, announced in newspapers, together with the deceased's obituary, contrary to what is done in the UK. The date and time for the funeral service is often disclosed in the obituary as well.

However, this seemingly open invitation for the viewing does not signify that all mourners will be present at the same time, mostly because they can choose a time, within the announced timeframe, which is more convenient for them. The deceased's family normally has an hour of "private time", before the "general viewing", which indicates a further separation between them and other mourners. Harper (2010) also stresses that, at that particular funeral home, no one is permitted to view the body before the private, family time has taken place; but after it, the viewing room becomes public.

In the event of a mourner not being able to view the body during the set timeframe, calling and arranging a separate timeslot is also possible. However, Harper notes a very interesting aspect of that particular funeral home: visiting

outside of the set viewing times remained possible, even without getting in touch with the funeral home's staff, because access to the viewing rooms was possible without them, and they understood the funeral home itself to be a public space.

But what do people in the US do during a viewing? Harper explained that visitors could be guided to the casket or approach it individually. There, different ways of interacting with the deceased are possible: touching the casket, the deceased, or their clothes, kissing them, making a sign of the cross, talking or simply looking are some examples, as well as holding conversations with other mourners, by the casket. If a prayer bench is in place, some can kneel and pray. The length of time spent in the deceased's presence is undetermined.

On the day of the funeral service, a last, "final viewing" period is set, with the general duration of one hour. Attendees are invited by the funeral director to approach the casket one last time, for paying their "final respects" (Harper, 2010, p.107).

Since no one presides or directs a Brazilian wake, family and friends can choose to address those present by giving a speech about the deceased, reading a poem or singing songs – mainly laments in the form of Catholic hymns. Lamenting, considered to be a practice of the past by the aforementioned encyclopaedias (Bryant & Peck, 2009, Howarth & Leaman, 2001), still is quite present in Brazilian wakes. The hiring of professional mourners, though uncommon, is still happening (Freitas, 2009; Pereira, 2012), even in urban centres like São Paulo. The professional women responsible for carrying out the lament are called *carpideiras* or wailing women.

As religion is ever present in Brazil, especially Christian ones, even if a professional *carpideira* is not hired, it is almost certain that one mourner will know the chants and laments by heart and will take the lead, encouraging others to partake in it. The moments when this lamentation will be carried out tend to be the same listed by Bryan & Peck (2009, p.982). Lamenting, when not hired as a service, is mostly a spontaneous act.

Music is almost never played, but rather sung, a cathartic expression as lamentation. Projection of photos and videos are also exceptions; so much so that it would require a specific wake room altogether, and for its uncommon nature it is possible to affirm that most wake centres are not equipped with this kind of apparatus, and if they are, possibly only one wake room in a wake centre

will offer this opportunity. These extras, if available, can be hired at an increased cost, and it is interesting to note that some of the features which are considered luxury add-ons in Brazil, offered only by specialised funeral homes in the country, are actually the projection of videos, music, and the offering of food, which are normal to some Europeans and North Americans (Carneiro, 2016).

Eating and drinking do not configure an essential part of Brazilian wakes; actually, in urban Brazil, food is majorly absent, for it is understood that this is something the bereaved family should not worry about in such distressing times, in the sense of providing food for others. Brazilians like to offer abundance; therefore, this social expectation would be maintained at a wake, adding to its costs.

Since the Brazilian wake is not performed at home, there is no such thing as what some North Americans do, with neighbours and extended family gifting the bereaved with meals (Graham, 2017). In fact, in standard, Brazilian wake rooms, there is not even a proper space for offering food: all available space must be, ideally, filled with people and flowers. Wake attendees therefore take care of their nourishment themselves, before going to the wake. If they intend to stay for several hours, which is very common, they will take turns in going to the wake centre's cafeteria or a nearby café, for example. This is to ensure the bereaved family will always have company, and that the coffin is never left alone, resounding the definition of wake made by Howarth & Leaman (2001). In fact, Brazilians pity the bodies who have few people around them or that are left completely alone in the wake room overnight.

Only when the wake is drawing to its end, a religious figure, commonly a priest or pastor, is then summoned, for a fee, to pray over the deceased; or in the case of a humanist wake, someone will address the attendees, before closing the coffin, signalling the final goodbye. It is common for this to be the moment when the wake becomes more crowded, for some people choose to arrive just before the religious figure does. However, the length of time spent at a Brazilian wake is almost always measured by hours (at least one), and not by minutes, as it is the case for the UK and the US in their private visitations or viewings.

The final prayer tends to be the most emotional moment of the wake. Humanist wakes, that is, wakes with no religious reference, are still quite unheard of in Brazil. This is very likely a result of the strong religious synergy in the country

and the general understanding that including religious elements in the wake of an atheist, for example, 'won't hurt'. Brazilians tend to play it safe, a 'just in case' attitude, for they prefer to '*sin*' by excess rather than by absence<sup>20</sup>.

After the final prayer, the coffin is closed. This is also a very emotional moment, for it really is the last chance to see the deceased's face clearly<sup>21</sup>. The closed coffin is then placed in the hearse by those closest to the deceased, mainly men. Professional pallbearers are also almost unheard of. The congregation will then follow the hearse to the place of disposal, composing the *cortejo*, and as people tend to drive their own cars, rides are offered to those who cannot drive or do not own their own means of transportation.

Sometimes in the UK, the cortège is the first ritual in a funeral, and this funeral will, very likely, be composed of a funeral ceremony (or funeral service), and a cremation. If the cortège does not include all of those who are welcome to pay their respects to the deceased (for it is common for attendees, apart from closer family members and friends, to gather at the crematorium), then the only instance where all funeral attendees are gathered together is the funeral service. However, if the place where the body was prepared and the place where the cremation will happen is the same, then there is no cortège, only a funeral ceremony (or funeral service).

Some Brazilian funerary companies own funeral homes, wake centres and cemeteries or crematoria, so it is becoming quite common for this process to be dealt with by the same company throughout. This sometimes enables wake centres to be adjacent to cemeteries, or even inside them, making the *cortejo*, (or funeral procession) a very short one in Brazil. At the same time, it is also common for it to be fairly long, crossing densely-populated neighbourhoods, going through heavy traffic and other setbacks. This is because when cemeteries were established as the only place for burial in Brazil, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, they were placed as distant as possible from the city centres, an issue which will be further addressed on Chapter 3.

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<sup>20</sup> The literal translation of a popular saying, '*pecar por excesso*', not always used in religious context. For example, when Brazilians throw a party, they prefer to have much more food and drinks available than the number of guests. In the wake setting, this *modus operandi* is present for the benefit of the deceased. If God does not exist, no harm will be done by adding religious elements, even if against the deceased's wishes. But if He does, those elements will give the deceased a good start when meeting their Creator.

<sup>21</sup> For, as previously mentioned when describing coffins, some have a glass, window-like feature which allows the deceased's face to be visible even if the coffin is closed.

Though the country has expanded, and cities have grown to encompass the once distant cemeteries, the scale of some Brazilian metropolises is quite impressive by themselves. In this case, the procession follows the same flow of the traffic, losing the usual slow, solemn pace. Reasons for burial in a distant cemetery from the deceased's home can be as simple as the family plot already being located in that particular cemetery, or if it was the deceased's wishes. Cost, as in the price of the plot, if the family does not already own one, can also be a reason for burials in distant cemeteries.

When arriving at the cemetery, mourners will gather around the grave for a final prayer, song or lament, or even a combination of all of them. This is another highly emotional moment, for it really *is* the last instant in the company of the body of a loved one. After the coffin has been placed and sealed inside the grave<sup>22</sup>, attendees will disperse slowly, many staying behind to oversee the closing of the grave and to still offer company to the mourning family, making sure they have everything they need, like tipping the gravedigger, or giving them a ride, for example. There is no further gathering after this: it is understood that the family or those closest to the deceased need to rest from these highly active and emotional hours.

If the body is being cremated<sup>23</sup>, the procession follows the same structure. In the city of São Paulo, where crematoria are administered by the municipality, there is a short, fifteen-minute ceremony held at the crematorium before handing in the body. The family can choose up to three songs to be played during this ceremony, which is mainly held in silence, the coffin kept closed, with a few words of comfort offered by a ceremonialist<sup>24</sup>. Cremations happen only twice a week, so mourners do not wait around to pick up the ashes; they must do that at a later time, as it is the case of the Crematorium of Vila Alpina, the main crematorium in São Paulo<sup>25</sup>.

In the UK, where cremation is the most common way of disposal, crematoria generally have more than one chapel for holding funeral ceremonies, but only

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<sup>22</sup> Brazilian graves are generally composed of concrete or rock lined vaults, which are sealed off with a concrete or marble plate.

<sup>23</sup> According to a law from 1973 (Law nº 6.015 from the 31<sup>st</sup> of December 1973, altered by the law nº 6.216, from the 30<sup>th</sup> of June 1975), cremation needs to be authorised by a Judicial authority after the death certificate has been signed by two doctors or by one medical examiner, in the case of violent death.

<sup>24</sup> As described by a friend who had two family members cremated there in 2013 and 2014.

<sup>25</sup> This information was made available to me during a guided tour, part of a conference fieldtrip in 2016.

one waiting room, which indicates that attendees have to wait for the cortège to arrive in order to proceed to the chapel where the ceremony will be held. Bailey (2012, p.97) points out that this can cause some confusion, and people can “follow the crowd into the wrong ceremony<sup>26</sup>”.

Attendees then depend on the funeral director and the officiant (the person who will conduct the ceremony) for this. The way in which people are seated in the chapel is related to hierarchy. Seating is organised in rows, and the coffin, which seems to be always closed, is placed in the front of the room, on top of a catafalque. The officiant is the one who will be closer to the coffin throughout the ceremony. People do not seem to gather around it, and there seems to prevail a distance between the deceased, contained in a closed coffin, and those attending the funeral ceremony. The boundaries of death are clearly determined. After the ceremony is concluded, attendees are led to another part of the crematorium, where flower arrangements and sympathy cards are displayed.

This viewing of the flowers is the first occasion when those responsible for arranging the funeral are able to interact with others (Bailey, 2012). This signifies that the flower arrangements are not part of the funeral ceremony, and as Harper (2010) explains, in the particular funeral home she studied, flowers are simply stored in the funeral home in another room and are only displayed just before they are to be arranged in the hearse (p.110).

The displaying of flower arrangements after the ceremony is, however, a very short period of interaction, lasting up to ten minutes. This period is characterised by Bailey as “informal” (p. 104), and attendees are led by the funeral director out of the crematorium shortly afterwards.

In Brazil, normally, the flowers which were offered as tribute and displayed at the wake, are used to decorate the grave, but if cremation was the chosen method of disposal, these flowers are very likely to be thrown away<sup>27</sup>, which can be considered a waste, given the price paid for them. The cost for Brazilian

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<sup>26</sup>The way in which Brazilian wakes are organised prevents this, for the deceased and their family will already be, most of the time, present at the wake room when mourners start to arrive. So, as mourners arrive, they immediately know which room they must go to. If they do not know the deceased's family, this is indicated by a plaque which displays the name of each individual being waked at each room. The family receives the mourners, not the other way around.

<sup>27</sup> As I have witnessed during a fieldtrip visit to the Crematório da Vila Alpina, in São Paulo.

funerals is quite varied, depending on the aforementioned 'combos' offered by some funeral homes.

The price of the coffin will mainly dictate the overall price of the funeral; however, since Brazilians do not need a celebrant, prices revolve around transporting the body to the funeral home, preparing it for the wake, the type of coffin, flower wreaths, hiring the wake room, and the hearse. Normally, the only vehicle hired for a funeral is the hearse, and this is a car, not a horse-drawn carriage. This could be because car ownership is so common in Brazil, especially in large cities. The hiring of limousines or such-like vehicles for the family of the deceased is as unheard of as the use of caskets.

Other items which can contribute to increasing the cost of a Brazilian funeral can be related to the comfort of the place where the wake will happen; for instance, there can be different kinds of *salas de velório* in a *Central de Velórios*; they will have different sizes and offer different facilities for the bereaved family, like a private, smaller room right next to the one where the body is being displayed. This private room can be used for spending the night, especially if the family chooses to have a twenty-four-hour wake or to hold it at night-time.

Bryant & Peck's (2009) entry on wakes ends by concluding that modern embalming is allowing wakes to be held at home once again. This is not the case in urban Brazil, which can be attributed to the limited size of homes and the increase in the number of people living in apartments (IBGE, 2009), especially in the urban South and Southwest, the most developed regions of the country. This lack of horizontal space in big cities is the same issue which led wakes to be held in funeral homes in the first place, and it will possibly remain this way in the country.

Holding a wake in an apartment building would only be possible if the deceased's family would be willing to also take care of preparing the body for it, if death happened there. However, this does not seem to be happening now.

Because of this, the place where a wake is held in Brazil does not increase its meaningfulness alone, as the authors of the *Encyclopaedia of Death and the Human Experience* suggested would be the case for wakes held in North American or European homes (Bryant & Peck, 2009, p.984).

From a general point of view, Brazilian wakes can be considered a spectacle, where the more people and flowers the better, where tears are shed



freely and in general no one is trying to 'keep it together'; where emotions can be shown to the point of exasperation, and where this display of grief is not always private, but most of the time, even loud.

The way Brazilian wakes are done is much closer to the anthropological definition offered by the author of the *Macmillan Encyclopaedia of Death and Dying* (Kastenbaum, 2003): the public proclamation of death, which is as strong as it ever was and shows no signs of weakening. Brazilians, in this sense, will not be deprived of communal expressions of death-related emotions as other Western cultures have been after removing the wake from its funerary rituals.

#### **4.1 Seventh-Day Mass**

Brazilians do not perform a memorial service, like many in the US do, but a Seventh-Day Mass. In the UK, a gathering after disposal is sometimes called a wake, which can be confusing for those who understand wakes as a ritual held in the presence of a dead body, as discussed previously.

The Seventh-Day Mass is a Catholic ritual of passage which delimitates a divide between the death of a person and the resuming of normal life (Pereira, 2012). The Seventh-Day Mass is performed as another measure to assure the salvation of the deceased's soul. The number seven is related to several Biblical aspects; for example, it represents the perfection of God and the belief that God, after creating the world, rested on the seventh day. Therefore, the mass is held on the seventh day after death, for it represents the deceased's resting day after their Earthly life (Pereira, 2012). Other references can be found in the Bible related to the period of mourning or fasting after the death of Jacob (Gn, 50,10), Saul (1 Sm, 31, 13) and Judith (Jt, 16,24).

Family and close friends are invited for Seventh-Day Masses, but the event has the potential to become more of a public occasion. Invitations are issued in the newspapers, often with a picture of the deceased and messages of gratitude from the bereaved family. The popular aspect of the Seventh-Day Mass in this sense is the fact that it is held in a church, which is understood as a public space in many ways. Therefore, whoever chooses to attend a Seventh-Day Mass is welcome, much more openly than in funerals. As with the *velório*, nowadays information on Seventh-Day Masses can also be posted on social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram.

The religious aspect of the Seventh-Day Mass is evident. However, it can occur even if the deceased was not a religious person, in the same way as hiring a priest for closing the wake. The family is the one who decides whether to have that ceremony or not and, in contemporary Brazil, it serves as another ritual form of comfort for the living, in the same way proposed by Walter (1991) when referring to funerals belonging to the living, not to the dead.

The Seventh-Day Mass can be performed in two basic formats: it can be completely dedicated to the deceased, with homages by family and friends – in this sense, closer to what a memorial service is; or a regular mass presided exclusively by the priest or other religious figure, where the names of all parishioners who are completing seven days of death are placed in a list and read or mentioned throughout the mass. In this sense, there is no Humanist or secular ritual to replace it in Brazil, like the memorial service in the US. Memorials can happen a few days or weeks after death, depending on when the funeral happened, in places of worship or other appropriate location. In the US, however, this is not known as a wake.

UK Funerals can have an entirely optional ritual called the Funeral Tea. They are not similar to Seventh-Day Masses and are held right after disposal, and not a week after it. The place where it is held may vary, but possible venues are the deceased's or the funeral arranger's home, a pub or hotel. This is an invitation only event and is "informal and unstructured" (Bailey, 2012, p.104). Bailey also signals that research on this event is scarce, mostly because of its enhanced privacy aspect, or because research tends to concentrate on the funeral professionals. Funeral teas are largely known in the UK, by the public, as wakes<sup>28</sup>. After this tea, then the UK funeral is over.

## **5 Virtual Wake, Not Funeral Webcasting**

With the clarifications provided in this chapter, regarding Brazilian funerals and the rituals which are included in them, perhaps the reasons why a virtual wake is named as such were made clearer.

A virtual wake is the online, real-time transmission of an actual wake; it starts when the wake starts and ends when the coffin is closed in order for the

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<sup>28</sup> Whenever I had to explain my research to British people, I always asked them first if they knew what a wake was. Nine times out of ten I got this definition of a 'gathering after disposal' as a response.

cortège to begin. Because it does not include the cortège and disposal, which are part of the triad which characterises a funeral in Brazil, they cannot be named 'funeral webcasting', as they are in the US and, more recently, in the UK, where they are known as 'live-streamed funerals' or 'webcast funerals'.

In the UK and the US, its nomenclature is appropriate because what is broadcast is the 'funeral service'. The main difference between 'viewings', 'funeral services' and 'wakes', for the purpose of this clarification, is that viewings tend to be not only optional, but also of short duration, despite the body being possibly available for it over a couple of days. The fact that it can be a solitary ritual, between the deceased and whomever chooses to visit, also contributes to its distinction, which is the case of viewings in the UK.

A funeral service is a short ceremony, as it is in the US and the UK, which can be or not be held in the presence of the deceased's casketed or coffined body; if it is, the body, being closed inside the vessel, is not in view. Being able to see the body and interact with it is one of the main premises of a wake. In the US, this interaction with the body seems to be more present in their viewings, as opposed to the UK.

Wakes, as understood in the UK and the US contexts, seem to be a lost ceremony which was similar to the Brazilian one, but has been substituted by viewings. As aforementioned, in Brazilian wakes, family, friends and other mourners are joined together in the same room, almost always during the same continuous and longer timeframe, with the deceased. The deceased's family or those closest to them never leave them. The body is almost always on display, excluding some particular circumstances; therefore, the body is also in full display during the virtual wake. In fact, the possibility to visualise the body and interact with it is the main aspect of the Brazilian wake, real or virtual.

There is another practice that could be considered similar to a virtual wake but is not: in the Netherlands, as investigated by Altena & Venbrux (2012), the making of posthumous films is becoming another way to memorialise the dead. Such films are constructed after death, as virtual wakes are, thought of and organised by those left behind as a form of honouring their deceased loved ones. They are composed of photos and home videos of the deceased in life, and have also a more private aspect to them, though some can choose to make it public.

A virtual wake could also be seen as a form to honour the deceased, but they are real-time transmissions of the wake only, and not curated and edited as posthumous films are. But virtual wakes can also be considered as “instruments that connect the living with the dead in the process of learning to cope with loss” (Altena & Venbrux, 2012, p. 206), in the same fashion as posthumous films.

## **5.1 Why virtual wakes can be interesting to watch**

At least for Brazilians, to whom wakes are extremely important, their virtual form can be seen as a possibility, a second-best scenario when attending the actual wake itself is not possible. This can be in situations where there are no finances available, in case of needing to travel great distances, or when it is not possible to make work arrangements, or even for people with mobility issues. This alone constitutes the virtual wake as part of a broader cultural shift in the 21st century in dealing with death and dying, where information technology, especially in the shape of the Internet, contributes to creating both new and alternative forms of sociability. When it comes to death and dying, these new and alternative forms of sociability also include actions such as sending virtual flowers, cards, lighting virtual candles, virtual cemetery tours, the creation of memorial websites and of memorialised social media accounts, for example.

But virtual wakes are different from these online forms of sociability, and from real wakes themselves, mostly because they enable the presence of strangers without them being noticed by the ones present at the actual wake. In addition, those watching virtual wakes could be understood as gathered together in cyberspace, but alone, physically separated. Outside the *Profiles de Gente Morta* group, there does not seem to be another platform for virtual wake watchers to converge and make comments on what they are seeing, together.

If a wake is about a body being accompanied by family and friends, then a virtual wake is an extension of it; the interaction between those watching a virtual wake is different from the interaction between those at the real wake. This is mainly because they are not physically present in the same space. At the wake, attendees are expected to behave and participate in a certain way, with prayers, partaking in singing and conversation being the main activities, as well as interacting with the deceased in different ways.

In essence, watching virtual wakes of strangers is no different from post-mortem photography, for this had a public aspect to it as well: these photographs were commonly distributed, serving not only as a memento, but also as a collector's item. Virtual wakes themselves, apart from the possibility of being public, can also be collected: either by taking screenshots from the broadcast or by saving the entire broadcast in the form of a video file. Post-mortem photography, however, majorly focused on trying to preserve the image of the deceased at a liminal state: most common depictions are of the deceased as if asleep or posed and arranged in a way to disguise the fact that they are dead (Borgo, Licata & Iorio, 2015).

Virtual wakes, however, do not possess that quality; what is on display is the face of the deceased. As, in Brazil, embalming is not a common practice, there is no way to disguise the fact that the person inside the coffin is actually dead, though efforts are made to soften that aspect. The variety factor, for a collector, would be, for example, the different gatherings of people around the deceased, as well as different faces, in or out of the coffin, or the different flower tributes and their arrangement, as explained earlier in this chapter.

Also, watching virtual wakes cannot be differentiated from watching a telenovela or any form of social drama, such as reality shows, for instance. What some might find interesting in watching them is the fact that no one knows what is going to happen, in spite of them having a structure which does not change too much. Crowds, or no-one, can gather around the coffin; people can faint or feel sick, and even crimes can be committed during this ritual. There are cases of theft (Melo, 2014; Santos, Aleixo & Moura, 2017; G1, 2018), the wake can be the site of a shooting (Terra, 2005; G1, 2015; TN Online, 2018), or a protest (EFE, 2018, NE10 Caruaru, 2018) or there can be cases of uncertainty about the death (Costa & Szpacenkopf, 2017) or that the deceased was actually alive (R7, 2016; ClickPB, 2017). Also, there can be situations where the coffin, or the stands holding the flower tributes, or the candle-shaped lamps, are knocked over, as well as any other kind of accident, really, because normally there are a lot of people gathered together in a small room.

In this way, not only because of the showing of emotions, from which Brazilians tend not to shy away, but also because of unforeseen circumstances, virtual wakes can be understood as a form of entertainment.

There can be also people who have a fetish for death and dead bodies, who would see virtual wakes as similar to a peepshow; others, who might see it as a form of dark tourism, being interested in the life stories of the deceased as one is when visiting a site of mass destruction, for example. However, none of these circumstances was mentioned by PGM members who answered the questionnaire created for this research.

Still, it is very difficult to predict if and how the mediated quality of virtual wakes can alter the meaning and/or experience of actual wakes. Nevertheless, since Brazilians attend wakes of people they knew and loved, or those close to them, it is possible to speculate that, at a real wake, emotions would most definitely take over whatever experience one had while watching virtual wakes of strangers. The same can be expected for those watching virtual wakes of loved ones, because there probably is an emotional connection to the deceased, or to those present at the real wake, which can inhibit alterations in the meaning or experience of a wake.

## **6 Summary**

This chapter has been dedicated to clarifying this thesis' contribution to knowledge, which is to present contemporary Brazilian funerals to the Global North and to serve as a basis literature on how contemporary Brazilian funerals are carried out, and the interest some Brazilians have in watching virtual wakes of strangers. In order to achieve that, an explanatory definition of contemporary wakes in Brazil was presented, followed by the definitions of funerals and wakes, according to Death Encyclopaedias.

The chapter has also defined that Brazilian funerals are composed of a triad: *velório* (wake), *cortejo* (cortège, or funeral procession) and disposal (more commonly *enterro*, or burial). It has also explained that Brazilians normally perform an additional ritual called Seventh-Day Mass, which is similar to a memorial service but is the only optional ritual in the Brazilian context and is not included in the idea of a funeral in the country. As the chapter offered a contrasting perspective to funerary rituals in the UK and the US, it has also raised the differences and similarities between these countries when it comes to funerals.

For instance, it was made clear that, in the UK, all rituals, apart from disposal, are optional. Not only the word 'funeral' can be used to define different rituals, but also the word 'wake' is sometimes used to refer to a gathering after disposal has taken place, which can also be referred to as funeral tea. A period of days or weeks normally elapses between death and the performance of the first ritual, generally to ensure attendance, rather than making the funeral last for longer, as it does in Brazil.

One might ask if this delay in the UK is in benefit of the dead or of the living. It seems like it is for the living, especially because viewings are optional, an individual choice with the potential to be a lonely experience as well. Attendance to the funeral service (or ceremony) is determined by the deceased's family or those responsible for organising it, which can grant funerals in the UK an excluding perspective. However, during the service, the deceased can be contained inside a closed coffin, away from view, and the coffin itself can sometimes be covered as well.

Another excluding factor is that cortèges, when held, can be composed of just close mourners. UK funerals are extremely orchestrated and, despite the attempts at individualisation (flowers arranged in different words and shapes, especially hired cars, coffins with different colours), the structure remains so inflexible that it is difficult to be spontaneous or even to acknowledge the proposed individuality. The congregation is 'led' in, the service is 'led', the congregation is 'led' out. Funeral attendees seem to be followers.

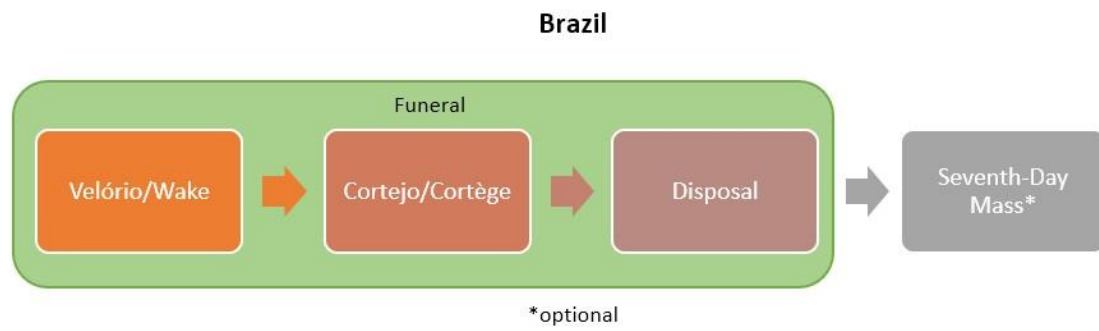
A final question one may ask is if these highly-orchestrated funerals are as effective in coping with loss as looking, touching and actually spending time with the deceased can be. From a Brazilian perspective, the way death and the dead are hidden away in the UK is more detrimental than helpful to the living.

In the US, all rituals, apart from disposal, are optional as well; however, the holding of viewings or visitations seem to remain quite strong throughout the country. The word 'funeral' or the expression 'funeral service' can be used to define different rituals, as the word 'wake' can also be used to refer to the viewing or visitation. A period of days or weeks sometimes elapses between death and performance of the first ritual, which can be the result of the different permits and paperwork generally required prior to arranging a funeral.

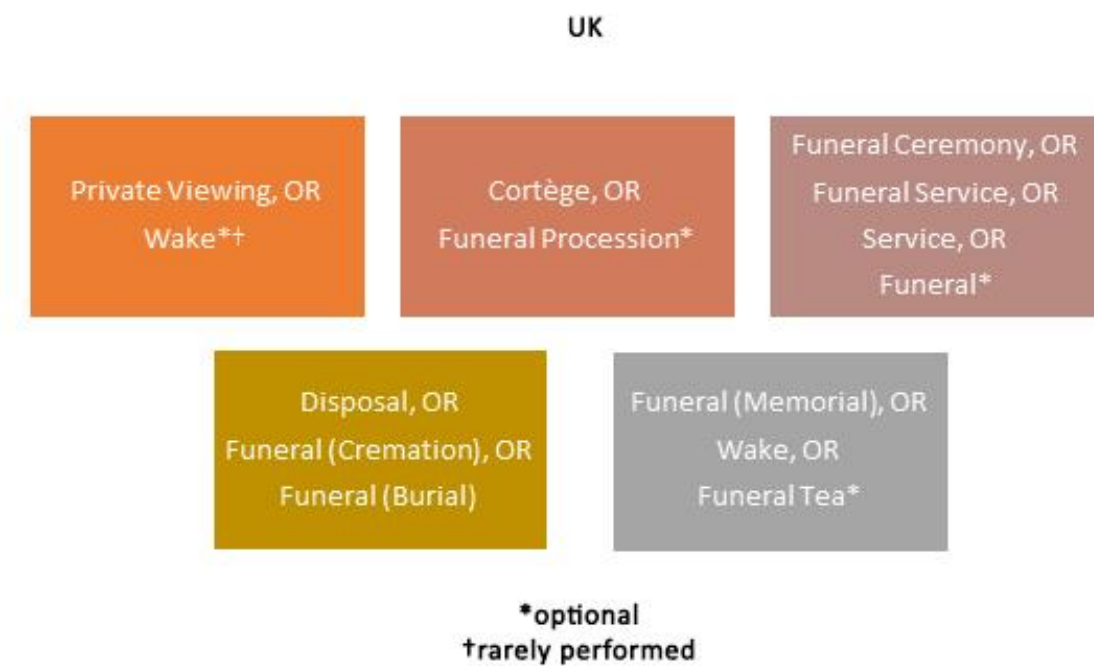
It is interesting to note that the word 'convenience' is most easily found in the literature regarding UK and US funerals, but not in Brazilian ones. If it does, it is not a governing principle in the sense of making the funeral convenient to the living. However, one instance where convenience might be starting to play a part in Brazilian funerals is the offering of virtual wakes. To complement the comparison and contrast between the three countries, charts have been created to better visualise the way in which funerals are generally structured in Brazil, the UK and the US (Figures 1, 2 and 3).

Lastly, this chapter has also drawn up on some of the reasons why virtual wakes can be interesting to watch. But to better understand wakes, either real or virtual, and the reasons why they are so important in Brazil, it is necessary to look into the country's funerary history first, which will be addressed in Chapters 3 and 4, divided between death practices in the 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

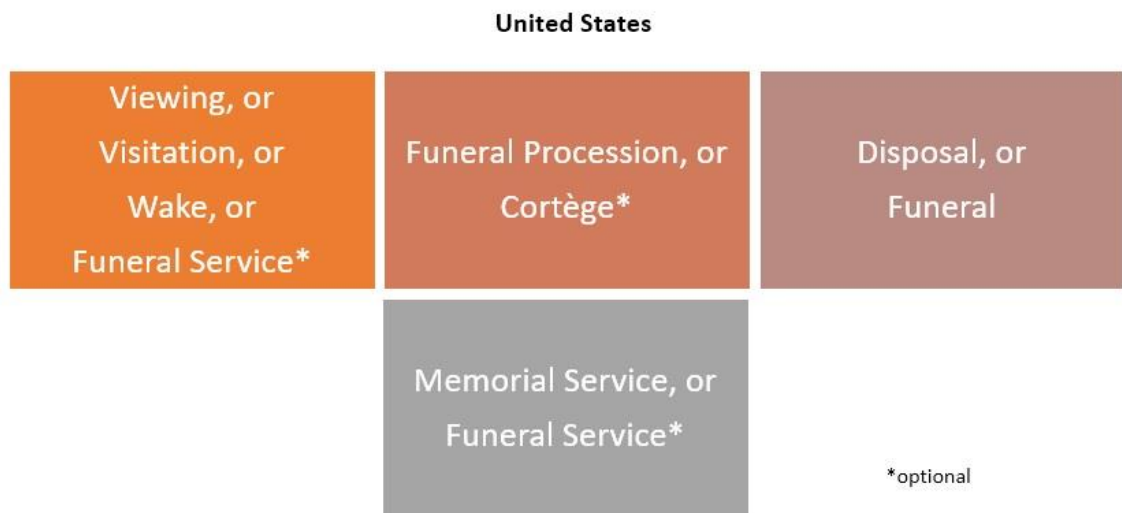




*Figure 1 - Visual representation of how funerals are organised in Brazil*



*Figure 2 - Visual representation of how a funeral is organised in the UK, and which ceremonies can be involved in it*



*Figure 3 - Visual representation of the rituals that can compose a funeral in the United States*

## Chapter 2: Methodology

This chapter starts by briefly introducing the field in which this research was constructed: the online group *Profiles de Gente Morta*, also referred by its members as 'PGM'. Some of PGM's particularities will be clarified while how the research was conducted is explained. It also presents the adopted methodology, with the principle that this is a large-scale, survey-based, qualitative, exploratory and inductive study (Given, 2008).

A detailed discussion on the adopted procedures explains how the research field was chosen and its implications for this work. It outlines how data were gathered and how contribution was requested from members of the aforementioned group. Ethical issues related to online research and the subject of entering and leaving the research field close the debate on methodology.

### 1 Introducing the Research Field

The *Profiles de Gente Morta* is an online group created in 2004 on a social network site called Orkut. In 2012, it migrated to Facebook and, as Orkut was closed in 2014, it now remains active on Facebook only. The group is dedicated to cataloguing links to profiles of deceased Facebook users<sup>29</sup> and, within it, members debate issues and share their experiences regarding death and dying. At the peak of its popularity on Orkut, PGM had more than 80 thousand members; on Facebook, it currently has over 15 thousand<sup>30</sup>.

But profile-cataloguing is not the only activity carried out by PGM members: some of them also access cameras from funerary companies in Brazil which openly broadcast virtual wakes. They watch these virtual wakes, as defined in the previous chapter, and make comments on what they are seeing within the group. One of the most interesting aspects of this behaviour is that they do not know the deceased or their family. They watch the virtual wakes of strangers.

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, funerals in Brazil were considered to be more public than private affairs, and the presence of strangers was widely accepted. By the end of that century, behaviours towards death and the dead began to change, and from the 1900s onwards, funerals and the rituals included in them, especially

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<sup>29</sup>During its existence on Orkut, it was dedicated to collecting links to profiles of users from that social network site.

<sup>30</sup> 15.582 in 12.04.2018.

wakes, began to be seen as private moments. This is why the behaviour portrayed by members of the *Profiles de Gente Morta* group, and their interest in watching the virtual wakes of strangers nowadays, is so important to this thesis.

However, strangers are not completely unwelcomed in actual Brazilian funerals, nowadays. This means that strangers would not be 'kicked out' of a funeral, but their presence can cause some sort of discomfort. There is a stigmatisation that can derive from this behaviour, along with the possibility of being seen as someone who likes to see others suffering. Therefore, virtuality, in the form of virtual wakes, is now offering these people the possibility of watching without being watched, or without causing discomfort to others. Virtual wakes can also be seen as an old behaviour being carried out with new tools, which is another reason why resorting to the historical background of funerals in Brazil is important for understanding it, and crucial to this thesis.

The research field is divided between PGM's existence on Orkut (2004-2012) and Facebook (2012-present). The group's presence on both social network sites will be addressed separately: the way PGM worked on Orkut will be explored in depth in Chapter 4, while its permanence on Facebook will be the theme of Chapter 5.

On the other hand, gathering information from funerary companies who host open virtual wakes proved to be impossible. *Urbam* and *Grupo Vila*, the main funerary companies whose broadcast of virtual wakes are viewed by members of PGM, were contacted, but never replied. The request was for details on how the possibility of hosting a virtual wake is presented to mourners; how much it costs for hiring the service; how privacy works or is ensured (both in private and in open virtual wakes); if mourners are informed that, in the case of an open virtual wake, anyone can access the broadcast; how many virtual wakes were already hosted by them; and what is the average, per month or year, of virtual wakes hosted by their companies. This is one of the reasons why this research was conducted from the point of view of those watching virtual wakes, not from those who are being watched.

Another motive for those being watched not to be represented in this thesis is, if getting information from funerary companies proved to be difficult, access to their clients could be considered even more complicated. This difficulty resides in the fact that funerary companies are the only ones in possession of information

on or contact details from their clients, and this information can be considered sensitive. One possibility for working around that would be for the funerary company to be willing to act as a mediator and get in touch with such families first, to discover if they would be keen to be included in this study.

If the funerary companies did not bother to answer requests for information related to their *modus operandi* on virtual wakes, getting in touch with families whose access could only be granted by them was far from a possibility.

## **2 Methodology**

This is a large-scale, survey-based research. Historical analysis (Thorpe & Holt, 2008) and some netnographic aspects (Bishop *et al.*, 1995) were also adopted. Historical analysis examines evidence in order to reach an understanding of the past. Though in Thorpe & Holt's book this method is presented as adequate for qualitative management research (2008), mostly for, but not restricted to, archive-based research as it serves to "establish cause and effect" between facts of the past, "in order to understand why things happened" (Thorpe & Holt, 2008, p.109). Therefore, it was an adequate method for analysing material pertaining to 19<sup>th</sup> century death practices in Brazil. This is why it was employed for understanding how death and the dead were perceived by Brazilians during that timeframe.

As briefly mentioned in the previous section, the 19<sup>th</sup> century is relevant to this thesis because it was a transitional period when the behaviour towards death and the dead began to change in the country. One of the possibilities that emerged from this examination of 19<sup>th</sup> century Brazilian death-ways is that it can explain why some contemporary behaviours exist, perhaps as a vestige of the way funerals were conducted then.

This is thoroughly addressed in Chapter 3: in order to compose it, a preliminary research on funeral practices in 19<sup>th</sup> century Brazil was performed. Literature on the theme, by Brazilian authors, is abundant, with important works by Cardozo (1947), Martins (1983), Reis (2003), Rodrigues (2006), Vailati (2010), Del Priore (2011) and Rodrigues (2014) to name a few. But since many of these works are profoundly based on accounts from foreigners who visited Brazil during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the original foreigners' accounts were consulted as well, through the method of historical analysis.

For consulting the foreigners, first, the original documents mentioned by the aforesaid Brazilian authors were selected; these original documents are travel accounts and reports from British and North American men who visited Brazil throughout the 1800s, published between 1805 and 1860 as books (Lindley, 1805; Turnbull, 1805; Barrow, 1806; O'Neil, 1810; Southey, 1810; Koster, 1816; Luccock, 1820; Graham, 1824<sup>31</sup>; Walsh, 1830; Kidder, 1845; Ewbank, 1856; Wetherell, 1860). Most of these travellers described situations in which they either voluntarily or involuntarily witnessed funerary rituals, or situations involving death, during their visit to Brazil.

These books are available on online databases, which enabled searching for key-words like 'velório', 'wake', 'funeral' and 'irmandades', or 'brotherhoods', to name a few, in order to identify the passages which were relevant to this study. The vocabulary for conducting these searches was acquired from consulting Brazilian literature on the theme, as previously mentioned. This focused search allowed gathering precious points of view on the funeral practises and superstitions of the time, along with the setting of 1800's Brazil, together with descriptions of the social structure of the cities of Salvador<sup>32</sup> and Rio de Janeiro.

Descriptions on the city of Salvador are important to this thesis because it was a significant political and social centre where, in 1836, the inhabitants destroyed a brand-new cemetery in a popular uprising against the prohibition of church burials. Reis (2003) suggests that this popular uprising represented Brazilians' unwillingness to change the way they dealt with death and the struggle to accept the advance of medical technology, which ultimately ostracised the dead in the country. This will also be addressed in depth in the next chapter. The city of Rio de Janeiro is also significant because it was where the Royal Family resided, therefore it was the seat of the government.

This historical analysis approach was based on the premise that the online part of this thesis is focused on the *Profiles de Gente Morta* group and their watching virtual wakes of strangers; therefore, for finding out possible reasons for this behaviour, other strangers, the 19<sup>th</sup> century foreigners, were considered

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<sup>31</sup> It is important to note that Maria Graham is the only woman whose accounts were available during this timeframe, and while access to her book is accessible online, searching for content is not possible. In order to search for the relevant keywords, the PDF version of her book had to be downloaded.

<sup>32</sup> Then referred to as the "town of Bahia" the first capital of Brazil (O'Neill, 1810, p.34).

as fonts for unveiling the funerary rituals in Brazil during that time, and to understand matters of publicity and privacy at/in regard to Brazilian funerals.

In the second part of this thesis, the work is very close to being a netnographic one, and the affinity with netnography is present especially in Chapters 4 and 5 because they describe and explain the research field, focusing on its particularities. Netnography is a term coined by a group of researchers from the United States (Bishop *et al.*, 1995) to describe the methodologic challenge of preserving the observation period at the online ethnographic field.

Kozinets (2010) defines netnography as a research method which adjusts traditional participant-observation ethnographic procedures to the “unique contingencies of computer-mediated social interaction” (Kozinets, 2010, p.58). He also defines netnography as a research that uses “data gathered through online interactions” (p.61). In this work, data was collected through online interactions, but in the form of a questionnaire. This is what distanced this research from being purely netnographic.

The decision to use polls and questionnaires to present the findings was made in order to differentiate this research from previous ones (Martins 2009; 2013), and in order to better answer the research questions. In this way, the questionnaire would give a more general understanding of the members of the *Profiles de Gente Morta* group, as opposed to glimpses from a few individuals, as it would be the case if private interviews or focus groups were adopted. Still, the questionnaire itself was responded to by 274 people, less than 2% of the group (which, between December 2015-February 2016, had around 15 thousand members).

Participant observation was also employed. Clifford (1998) defines the participant observation method as a fusion between ethnology and anthropology, starting with the work of Malinowski (1922), which is another reason to claim that this study is very close to being a netnographic one. For Vergara (2008), netnography widens the traditional ethnographic method by enabling the study of cyber culture, because ethnography consists of the insertion of the researcher in the environment they are studying. In virtuality, this environment can be a social network site, a website, a blog, a forum or a community, to name a few.

Online research can be performed anywhere; given the researcher has a computer or a portable device, like a smartphone or tablet, with Internet access.



This also brings a new perspective to ethnography because it does not separate the source from its context in order to allow for academic production (Clifford, 1998).

Pieniz (2009) understands cyberspace as a new space for human sociability. It can be analysed as an environment of collective intelligence and memory, as a cultural appropriated media by ordinary citizens and as a means of production, reception or circulation of discourses. In addition, cyberspace also contains forms of representation of the self, of identity reconfigurations, working as a stage for the expression of diversity, as a globalisation icon or as a virtual territory that deterritorialises and reterritorialises local cultures, but also as a cyberactivism space for the dissemination of ideas from minority groups.

Cyberspace as an environment was created by the collective intelligence and memory, which feeds it daily. The “ordinary citizens” mentioned by Pieniz (2009, p.3) are the ones contributing to the operation and constant renewal of cyberspace (Martins, 2013). The means of content production created by virtuality offers a wide field of observation because it is a receptacle sustained by ordinary people from various behavioural, cultural and social backgrounds.

Virtuality offers a more open way of interaction between individuals, sheltered by the possibility of anonymity. Because of this, individuals can feel more at ease to represent themselves in a different or subjectively improved way, allowing the construction of a self-image represented by profiles on social network sites. This diversity characterises not only a "new space of human sociability" (Pieniz, 2009, p.3), but also a creative environment for new forms of sociability, like a group of people who gets together to watch virtual wakes of strangers, an activity which is not possible offline.

In this sense, computers can transform the ways in which qualitative research is carried out and suggest new research themes on the Internet as data source or as a means of relationship between groups. Therefore, this is both an experiential and interpretive research.

## **2.1 Research Procedures**

Kozinets (2010) states that netnography covers ethnography's six main steps: planning, *entrée*, gathering data, interpretation, adhering to ethical principles and research representation, all in an online environment. This section

is going to explain how they were conducted, reinforcing the instances where they conformed to the netnography method. Because it is based on my experience and presence in the field as a researcher, these sections are mainly written in the first person.

### **2.1.1 Planning and Entrée**

Planning refers to the definition of the research questions and which topics to explore on which social sites. In this study, the planning procedure is directly related to the second procedure, named *entrée*, for I was already part of the *Profiles de Gente Morta* before deciding to study it.

In 2008, a friend told me about the group; I became curious and decided to see it for myself. At that time, as aforementioned, PGM was hosted on a social network site named Orkut: since I already was an Orkut user, I just needed to search for PGM in Orkut's database to find it and send a membership request, which was approved that same day. Then, I was just one amongst its tens of thousands of members.

In October 2008, a couple of months after I entered the group, a teenage girl named Eloá was kept as a hostage for one week, in her family flat, by her ex-boyfriend. The case was widely debated by Brazilian media and a TV presenter even interviewed the kidnapper during the captivity period. PGM members started to discuss the case, known as the 'Eloá Case', as soon as the first local reports of the incident started to appear on TV.

As the case developed, the PGM topic on it had all kinds of information gathered from TV, newspapers and online reports. The kidnapping ended with the police invading the flat; Eloá was fatally shot by the kidnapper, who was arrested. The whole case and the way in which PGM members worked together to keep others informed of what was happening, almost in real-time, caught my attention.

At that time, I was graduating with a degree in Journalism and decided to use PGM as a research subject for my TCC<sup>33</sup> (Martins, 2009), by analysing how

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<sup>33</sup> TCC stands for *Trabalho de Conclusão de Curso*, or what in the UK is known as an Undergraduate Dissertation. In most undergraduate courses in Brazilian Federal Universities, in order to obtain a diploma, it is necessary to write a TCC, which can be a *monografia*, or 'monography', and pass a viva examination. At Master's level, the same procedure applies, but only then the final work is called a *dissertação*, or 'dissertation'.

the community could be taken as a source for the production of journalistic content. Therefore, in a matter of months, I was no longer just a member, but also a researcher inside the *Profiles de Gente Morta*. During this first research, I discovered the virtual wakes and decided to continue exploring the community as a source for my Master's study in Anthropology (Martins, 2013).

As with my entree in the *Profiles de Gente Morta* community, my learning about virtual wakes was also due to curiosity. There, there was a topic titled "Wake Now", and I clicked on it seeking to learn more. As I discovered that virtual wakes were online, real-time broadcasts of actual wakes, and as I observed the group's behaviour through the comments made on that particular topic, I decided that virtual wakes would be the theme for my Master's dissertation. Though my entrée in the research field was as a member and not as a researcher, my permanence there has been as a researcher. Having entered the group in 2008, on Orkut, and having transitioned with it to Facebook, I have now been inside my research field for a decade.

Therefore, the definition of the topics and questions for this research occurred after I was already inserted in the research field. As aforementioned, this was defined after two prior investigations: the first was carried out as the TCC for my Bachelor's degree (Martins, 2009) and the second as the dissertation for my Master's degree (2013).

Since my Master's dissertation was an introductory research on PGM through the perspective of virtual wakes, the data collected and the possibilities of analysis it presented convinced me it was necessary to take a deeper look into the act of watching virtual wakes of strangers in Brazil, and the possible implications of this behaviour.

In this sense, the questions for this research were refined and defined during the construction of the research proposal, based on my Master's dissertation, as part of my admission process to the University of Bath as a PhD student.

### **2.1.2 Adhering to Ethical Principles**

An issue which is widely discussed when it comes to online research is the opportunity for the researcher to be and/or remain invisible. Since the fieldwork is conducted online, sometimes it is possible for the investigator to choose to

remain anonymous and not interfere in the group, by solely observing their behaviour. The possibility of interference in the field can be characterised by one of the modes of observation in traditional ethnography. The mode of observation which was adopted for this thesis was participant observation (Malinowski, 1932), which is a method of data collection, and it will be addressed further in section 2.4.

The possibility of remaining anonymous is defined as *lurking* (Kozinets, 2002) an English term that, according to the Collins Cobuild Advanced Dictionary (2009, p.937-938), means to be in a place without being seen and generally involving malicious intent. Anonymity in the first instalment of research within PGM has proven to be a safe and effective method of approximation, of getting to know the research environment before the actual start of the research process.

In this sense, by taking invisibility as an advantage, it was possible for me to learn how PGM worked, enabling me to approach it in a suitable way when revealing my presence as a researcher. This is because during the lurking period I had learnt to appropriately adhere to the group's rules and to use the group's language and specific terms. This happened when I first decided to study PGM in 2008, prior to the development of this thesis.

After the lurking period, I approached the whole group, on Orkut, by creating a post in the main forum, revealing my identity and intentions as a researcher. This approach allowed me to obtain the support of members who later became informants and gatekeepers. Many of them remained active in the group after its move to Facebook and are now a crucial part of the acceptance process of any researcher within the group.

Because new participants were allowed into Orkut-PGM daily, my presence as a researcher was only reinforced when the topic I created to call for contributors to my research was updated with new replies. Of course, after some time, that topic was no longer updated, and I was not able to continuously announce my presence as a researcher because of the strict rules which governed the group.

A similar tactic was used during the second research, when I approached the most active participants via personal messages to interview them individually. But, for the last portion of the second research, the group was already present on Facebook, and the dynamics changed a little, permitting me to make

announcements and requests more often. After the conclusion of both works, I made the text from my Bachelor's and Master's dissertation available to PGM, as a means of reciprocity for their contribution (Sahlins, 1974), receiving positive feedback and incentives to share future works, which I did, as well as any other material that was created as a result of my research, such as journalistic and academic articles.

Since I already had an established presence as a researcher within PGM by the time I started this thesis, I informed the group that I was continuing to study it at a PhD level, focusing on virtual wakes, and that members' further collaboration would be much appreciated. This communication was also well received by the group. However, the main difference between this research and the previous ones is that I was granted a privileged access to PGM's backstage, an issue I will further address in section 2.1.7.

### **2.1.3 Gathering Data**

This study is based on data collected through participant observation (Given, 2012) in the *Profiles de Gente Morta* group, both on Orkut (from 2008-2014) and on Facebook (2011-2017). Data from both sources was combined in order to illustrate the development of the group and their understanding of virtual wakes in Brazil over the years.

Participant observation is adopted when the researcher, in order to study certain aspects of everyday life of a particular group, has to take part in "everyday activities related to an area of social life" (Given, 2012, p.599), so these activities can be observed in their "natural contexts" (*idem*). This is an adequate method for studying social phenomena "about which little is known and where the behaviour of interest is not readily available to public view" (*ibidem*). Since the *Profiles de Gente Morta* group is not available for public view, in the sense that membership has to be approved (even if there are no approval criteria), it is out of reach to those who do not have a Facebook profile, and to those who do not speak Portuguese. Therefore, in this context, I am able to offer first-hand access to it, "allowing understanding of the way of life of others", as defined by Given (2012, p. 599).

Given (2012), however, argues that participant observation is not an adequate method of data collection for the study of large groups. At the same

time, this is also where this work diverges from netnography: in total, there are three sets of data, collected in three different ways: 1) screenshots of ten polls which were available on Orkut-PGM, between 2009 and 2014; 2) a topic which was posted on Orkut-PGM in 2009 entitled “Interview with Members”, containing nine questions; and 3) a questionnaire containing 25 questions, applied to Facebook-PGM members between 2015 and 2016. These sets of data and their particularities are further explained in chapters 4 and 5, which address PGM on Orkut and Facebook, respectively.

An additional source of information on PGM, both on Orkut and Facebook, are screenshots. These screenshots, however, are only used in this thesis to illustrate PGM and the behaviour of its members. An interesting aspect of the collection of screenshots from Facebook was the fact that I am an active user of that social network site, not just for research, but also for personal reasons; therefore, I am constantly online.

My being online happened either through computer or smartphone, through Facebook’s mobile app. This enabled me to access the research field at any time and place, so the gathering of screenshots was done differently than it was during previous research. On Orkut, screenshots<sup>34</sup> could only be taken via a desktop or laptop computer, limiting the information which could be gathered in this form<sup>35</sup>.

These screenshots, either from Orkut or from Facebook, have one thing in common: they pertain to any interesting interaction on PGM, such as comments from its members while watching virtual wakes, or while debating the contents of the profile of a deceased person, for example. As a result, an extensive screenshot library was constructed, with more than 200 images. Only a few have been selected to be featured in this thesis. The way in which the aforementioned sets of data were analysed is clarified in the next methodological stage.

#### **2.1.4 Interpretation**

After compiling the three different sets of data, they were analysed and developed in the chapters which correspond to the timeframe they are referred to (Orkut and Facebook). As aforementioned, data pertaining Orkut-PGM is

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<sup>34</sup> Sometimes also referred to as ‘print screen’, in that context.

<sup>35</sup> For example, an interesting post was made on the community, but it went against its rules. Since accessing the group was only possible through a computer, by the time one was able to access it, the post could have already been deleted.

composed of ten polls and nine questions from an “Interview with Members”. The polls offered mostly quantitative data, which was combined with official data from the Brazilian government, whenever possible, to contextualise them. Answers to questions of the “Interview with Members” were discursive and lengthy, therefore almost exclusively qualitative. In order to present them, they were organised in subcategories, depending on the question to which they referred to. This categorisation was achieved by separating answers according to the first adjective used by the respondent to define their opinion on each particular topic.

The same procedure was adopted to analyse answers from the questionnaire applied to Facebook-PGM members, because some of the 25 questions provided the possibility of lengthy, discursive answers to be elaborated. I have found that this categorisation was the best way to separate themes for analysis. These sets of data are also backed up by official data from the Brazilian government whenever possible. In some cases, since there is no official data to back up these findings, journalistic reports were consulted instead to illustrate or strengthen them.

As for screenshots, as aforementioned, they are used in this thesis as a way to illustrate the way PGM used to work on Orkut, how it currently works on Facebook, how its members used to interact then and how they interact now. These screenshots were not sources for interpretation or analysis themselves. Because of their illustrative nature, they were included in the body of the text, throughout this thesis, as opposed to placing them as annexes. This was done with the intent to ensure these images and the translation of the interactions displayed by them were not removed from context.

### **2.1.5 Informed Consent**

Both Orkut and Facebook-PGM members have been informed of my presence as a researcher within the group. Informing happened on separate occasions, on both platforms. In 2008, I sent a message to the owner of PGM on Orkut, asking for his permission to use the community as a research field, but I never received a response. Since I could not continue to depend on his reply to start my research, I decided to proceed autonomously and did something that

was quite scary, because of PGM's strict rules: I created an OFF topic<sup>36</sup> asking for the authorisation and members' collaboration for the research.

That way, if PGM's owner or moderators disagreed with my request, they would either delete my topic or send me a message in order to discuss it. As my post remained active and was well received by PGM members, I interpreted this as a permission to turn the community into a research field (Martins, 2017). Because this first attempt to obtain permission to study PGM was made during my first research, I was still unaware of the necessity of saving this in the form of a screenshot. Therefore, there are no means to illustrate this attempt.

On Facebook, I managed to successfully get in touch with the group's owner, and he was the one who explained to the group, in a post, my participation at PGM as a researcher. Since he is no longer active on Facebook, his post is no longer visible. Unfortunately, I did not foresee this, and did not take a screenshot of it either.

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<sup>36</sup> OFF Topics will be discussed later, on Chapter 4. Roughly speaking they are topics with death and dying as a theme, but do not contain links to profiles of deceased Orkut/Facebook users.





My lack of proof to the primary consent for researching PGM, however, can be ratified by other posts I made, further along the way, both on Orkut and Facebook. These posts contain the members' approval to my initiative, and their willingness to help by contributing to my research, as demonstrated by Figure 4.

The first screenshot was retrieved from Orkut, when I was asking PGM members to collaborate by answering a poll which I had recently created.

My message, as shown in Figure 4, was:

[OFF] Important Poll

Good night, you guys. I don't want to create an Irrelevant Topic for nothing, but I have just created a poll for you, for my Monography<sup>37</sup>, which will have PGM as part of its theme. As polls are not appearing in the Main Page, I'm using this space to inform you that there is this poll, and that your vote is really important to me. I thank you all who propose to help me, in advance. I hope you take part in it. Thank you, Andréia [link to the poll].

In this particular instance, there was some kind of problem on PGM (or perhaps a glitch on Orkut), which was not allowing polls to be displayed on the community's main page, as it normally happened. Consequently, I created this OFF Topic in order to request collaboration. Replies were all positive. Of course, the ones shown here are just a fraction of the replies, and I do not possess a screenshot of every reply. The first three ones can be translated as 'there you go', 'done', while the fourth is simply an 'OK'. The last two can be translated as 'yes, the chance for more members to know [about the poll] is bigger [with my post]', and the other one is 'what is your monography about?<sup>38</sup>'. I can recollect, however, only one instance where I got a bad feedback from my attempts to engage members to contribute to my research<sup>39</sup>.

On Facebook, for collecting data in the form of a questionnaire, I created a post telling PGM members once again about my research and the purpose of my request (Figure 5). I asked for their contribution while providing the link to the questionnaire itself. In my post, I explained that the questionnaire was anonymous and that I would make their answers available to the group once my

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<sup>37</sup> My use of the word 'monography' here reflects this differentiation in the Brazilian context, as explained in footnote 33.

<sup>38</sup> The use of the word 'monography' here is in accordance with footnote 36.

<sup>39</sup> This bad feedback was made by a member who simply wrote "who cares?" as a reply to my requests.

analysis was concluded. This is a translation of that post, followed by its screenshot:

[OFF] – Research about PGM and Virtual Wakes

Folks,

As many of you know, I have been researching PGM for years and the group was the subject of my final undergraduate and master's thesis, continuing as the focus of my doctoral thesis, which is about Virtual Wakes. Today I am a Moderator at PGM and I help to keep it running.

I would like to ask you to help me collect some data about you and your activities here. During Orkut times, we had a topic and some polls with this information, but we need to update everything. And this was the best way I found to do it, and also to analyse all the data when I use it in my thesis. The questionnaire is anonymous and takes at least four minutes to complete, so it's quick!

As I have done before, once the work is done I will post it here for you.

Anyone who wants to contribute in another way, just send me a message and we'll talk. Thank you so much for your attention and help!

As Figure 5 shows, the post was liked 80 times, and 79 people made comments on it. As expressed in the translation provided above, they were invited to participate by filling out the questionnaire. The creation of this post also served the purpose of informing new members, which are added daily, of PGM being used as a research environment. The comments, which are not shown here, were mainly about members letting me know that they had answered the questionnaire, wishing me good luck with my data collection, wanting to know more about my research, or sharing that they, too, were considering using PGM as a source for their own academic research.

There were no comments against the questionnaire or my use of the group as a research field. The comment section was intended as a space for this disagreement to be manifested, nevertheless, even if this was not expressed in my post, because this is how PGM works. The issue of privacy, when it comes to identifying members of the group, was never debated between myself and Orkut or Facebook-PGM members.

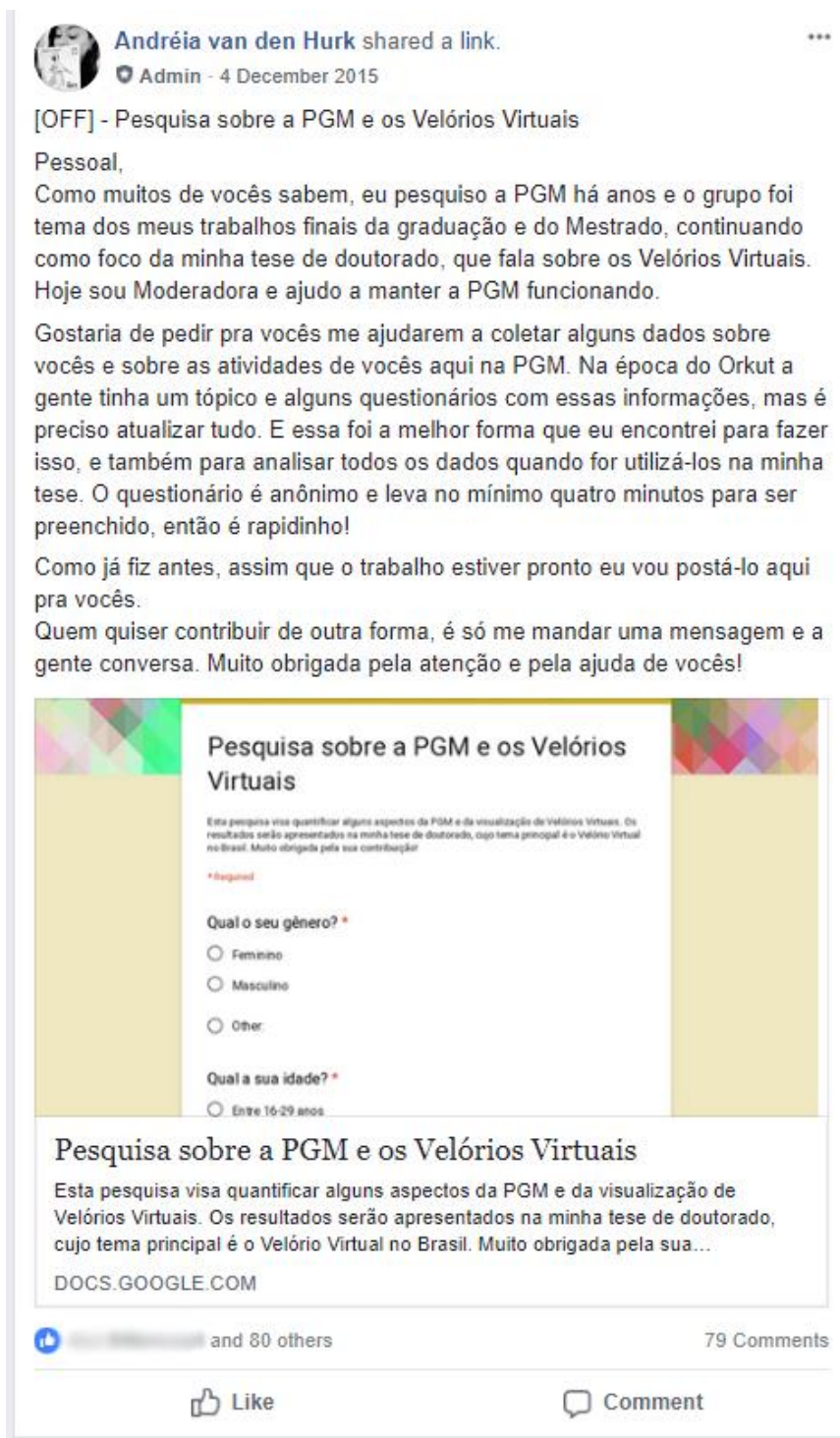


Figure 5 - Asking Facebook-PGM members for contribution (04.12.2015)

The issue was not raised even when Facebook-PGM, which started as a closed group, later became a secret one, a change which will be addressed in Chapter 5. As there were no comments against the conduction of my research, data collection continued.

According to the ASA's (Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and the Commonwealth) Ethical Guide (2011), informed consent is considered a process rather than a one-off event. But as on Orkut and Facebook, PGM had and has thousands of members, seeking permission from all of them was impossible.

Therefore, all identities which could be revealed by the screenshots included in this thesis are preserved by blurring all personal information, like photos and names. The questionnaire was constructed in a way that it remained anonymous, so there was no possibility of identification during the process of analysis.

#### **2.1.6 Privacy**

Because Orkut has been deactivated, this section focuses solely on Facebook, which defines public information as something that

can be seen by anyone. That includes people who aren't your friends, people off of Facebook and people who use different media such as print, broadcast (ex: television) and other sites on the Internet (Facebook Help Centre, n.d.).

On their Help Centre page, Facebook also explains which information is public, like users' age range, language and country. The page explains that Facebook uses a part of the user's profile, called 'Public Profile', to support the connection between users. The 'Public Profile' consists of the users' "name, gender, username and user ID (account number), profile picture, cover photo and networks". The page continues to explain that publicly shared information also consists of information displayed under the "Public" option within the sharing options:

When you choose to share something with Public (ex: when you select Public from the audience selector), it's considered public information. If you share something and you don't see an audience selector or another privacy setting, that information is also public. [...] Stuff other people share: If other people share info about you, even if it's something you shared with them but did not make public, they can choose to make it public. Also, when you

comment on other people's public posts, your comment is public as well (Facebook Help Centre, n.d.).

The definitions of what is public and private on Facebook then addresses posts on Facebook Pages or Groups:

Facebook Pages and public Groups are public spaces. Anyone who can see the Page or Group can see your post or comment. Generally, when you post or comment on a Page or to a public Group, a story can be published in the News Feed as well as other places on or off Facebook.

Remember that public information can:

- Be associated with you, even off Facebook
- Show up when someone does a search on Facebook or on another search engine
- Be accessible to Facebook-integrated games, applications and websites you and your friends use
- Be accessible to anyone who uses our APIs, such as our Graph API (Facebook Help Centre, n.d.).

Facebook's Help Centre also states that there are three different privacy levels for groups: Public, Private or Secret. These will be further discussed in Chapter 5. However, there is no clarification if information shared in closed or secret groups can be understood as private. But if one refers to the previous excerpt about sharing information, it defined that "if other people share info about you, even if it's something you shared with them but did not make public, they can choose to make it public". This premise is the one that allowed screenshots from the group itself to be compiled.

The Dead People Profiles was, between 2012 and 2016, a closed group. In February 2016 it became a secret one after problems arose between a fraction of its members and one of the administrators. In both instances, any information posted there is only visible to other members of the group. This information, created by the group's participants, is made available by the participants themselves and do not depend on my presence or request to be made available in the group. Therefore, comments, links, pictures and posts are shared inside the group by the members themselves, resting on their will to do so.

This alone does not allow me to reproduce information without their consent, since whoever shares information inside PGM is only doing it for other members to see. But my collection of screenshots is backed by Facebook's statement on the possibility of private information being shared publicly. As aforementioned, all

content was anonymised to ensure that those participants who did not agree with my presence and data collection, but did not make their disagreement available to me, were not identified, since there is no way of telling who they are in the first place.

In addition, permission to conduct research within PGM needs to be sought, at first, from the group's owner or administrators, which I have done prior to becoming an administrator myself. My becoming an administrator was, in fact, a result of this request, but not all those who seek to have PGM as a research field are made administrators or are granted access to the group's backstage. The reasons why I was made administrator can be linked to my long-standing presence in the group and with my friendly relationship with one of the group's most active members, who became the owner of PGM when it moved to Facebook. This will be further explained in the following section and in Chapter 5.

### **2.1.7 Gatekeepers and Informants**

My access to the research field did not depend on informants or gatekeepers (O'Reilly, 2009). Nevertheless, I interpret Facebook-PGM administrators as such because administering PGM is a collaborative work. This collaboration has been achieved in the past and there were no reasons for them not to contribute to this research.

Initially, my main gatekeeper was the owner of PGM on Facebook. On the 11<sup>th</sup> of July 2015, I asked him if I could be made administrator in order to gather more detailed data for this thesis, to which he complied. Since then, I have become one of the group's seven administrators, responsible for approving new members and other specific roles. This granted me yet another role to fulfil, for I was no longer just a member, or a researcher. I was also an administrator. The administrators' roles and PGM's functioning on Facebook will be debated in Chapter 5 as well.

## **2.2 Entering and Leaving the Field**

Since the research field for this study is an online one, I can be either in or out of it in a matter of seconds, through a couple of clicks on my computer or taps on my smartphone. For this reason, I considered myself to be constantly in and

out of the field on a daily basis for almost four years. This easiness in entering and leaving the research field has blurred the notions of the beginning and ending of the fieldwork stage (Martins, 2017).

The conclusion of data collection, for example, was a personal decision, rather than a set period of time. This was a difficult decision to make because I did not wish to leave PGM, and plan on continuing to be a member even after the conclusion of this work. If I left it, as a means to stop data collection and formally leaving the research field, I would no longer have access to the group, which would signify my leaving my post as administrator and abandoning a group in which I have been participating for a decade.

Another difficulty in choosing to stop data collection was related to my being constantly faced with new interactions and situations which could be used to debate the theme of this thesis. This is related to the three roles I have accumulated inside PGM: a member, a researcher, and an administrator (Martins, 2017). Conflicts which arose from the accumulation of these roles and from the instant access to the group via the Facebook mobile app are discussed in Chapter 5. In any case, data collection stopped in the winter of 2016, at the same time the questionnaire was closed.

### **3 Summary**

This chapter has delineated my research questions and the methods used to conduct this thesis: historical analysis, induction, the application of a questionnaire, and participant observation. It has defined the rationale for the methodological approach and its implications, as well as its six main steps: planning, *entrée*, gathering data, interpretation, adhering to ethical principles and research interpretation. The subject of entering and leaving the online research field was briefly addressed, emphasising that online research has the potential to blur the notions of when fieldwork begins and ends.



### **Chapter 3: Death in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Brazil**

The purpose of this chapter is to lay out the foundation for understanding the current behaviour around death and dying in Brazil through describing the country's death customs from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This description aims to clarify the ways in which funerals were carried out before the way death was perceived in the country changed, to complement the definition of funerals and wakes in Brazilian culture introduced in the Literature Review. It aims to highlight changes occurred in that time which are continued in adapted form today. This descriptive chapter relies mostly on 19<sup>th</sup> century accounts from foreigners who witnessed, voluntary or involuntarily, Brazilian funerary rites.

There are three reasons for using foreigners' accounts to illustrate Brazilian death rituals: the first, because the country was a place where attitudes towards death were of considerable interest to those visiting it during the period, so the ways in which Brazilians dealt with death was mostly documented by them. In some cases, travellers were involved in those rituals, and their experiences were documented in travel journals which were published as books in their home countries; the second reason is exactly because they were outsiders who did not fully understand 'the way of the land': this allowed them, most of the time, to describe, rather than interpret, what they witnessed; the third and final reason is because these descriptions were not compiled, to the same extent, by their contemporaneous Brazilian scholars, so their works have been continuously used as basis for studies on Brazilian society, by Brazilians, up to this day (Reis, 2003; Vailati, 2010).

In the first portion of this chapter, an introductory background of the country and of the two cities in which the foreigners' accounts were mainly focused will be laid out: Rio de Janeiro and Salvador<sup>40</sup>. This introductory approach is important because it provides a broader comprehension of the way Brazil was structured at the time. After that, a detailed description of the preparations and minutiae of funerals will be provided.

While narrating the ways in which funerals were prepared during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this chapter will also address some of Brazilian folklore and superstition around death and dying. In general, Brazilians behaved similarly to Europeans,

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<sup>40</sup> Though the majority of excerpts featured in this chapter are about Salvador.

especially the French, because they were strongly influenced by the old continent. Nevertheless, different nuances of the funerary rituals were added in the Brazilian context because of the combination of different religions and faiths from native indigenous peoples and slaves. Many, like British Protestant poet and historian Robert Southey (1810), did not see that mixture with good eyes.

He described the way Brazilians dealt with Catholicism under the influence of other faiths as “extravagant” and “superstitious” (Southey, 1810, p.689 tome II). In spite of his own prejudices and bias as a Protestant, Southey was correct. Brazilians were indeed quite superstitious - and they still are. In exploring this, the intent is to uncover the reasons why some behaviours and beliefs persisted in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and are still present in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, which will be explored in the next chapter.

## **1 Why the 19th Century Matters**

The 19th century is very relevant to this study because it comprises a transition period for death in Brazil, and the transition initiated during that time is what transformed the way in which death was seen and understood by Brazilians. Before detailing those changes, it is important to comprehend a little of the social and cultural background in which they were introduced.

In 1807, Brazil was the official court of the Portuguese royal family; in 1815, it became part of the United Kingdom of Portugal and Algarve. By 1822, it was converted into an empire and, in 1889, into an independent republic.

The Brazilian Empire period was the longest during that century, spanning 67 years, during which the country became politically independent from the Portuguese Crown, was ruled by two emperors, slavery was abolished and the republic was installed.

Throughout the 1800's, two regions were extremely important: the northeast and the southeast. The Portuguese first entered the Brazilian territory in 1500, in the area that later became the state of Bahia, situated in the northeast. In 1549, the city of Salvador was established, and as the region was a massive producer of sugar and the Portuguese needed to keep a close eye on it, Salvador was defined as the capital of the colony.

In the southeast is located the city of Rio de Janeiro, established in 1565, with an important geographic position, an extensive port area and closer to

regions where precious metals were profoundly explored. In 1572, the government needed to oversee both sugar plantations and mineral extractions, and the solution was to have two capitals and two government bases: one in Salvador and another in Rio de Janeiro. Nevertheless, in 1581, the title of capital returned to Salvador, only to be transferred back to Rio later in 1763, where it remained until the 1960s<sup>41</sup>.

Regardless of the uncertainty about where to place the Brazilian capital and government, during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, both Salvador and Rio de Janeiro were the most important centres for trading goods and slaves and therefore, obligatory stops for travellers. Society was divided between the rich and the poor; the rich were white landlords, and the poor were *pretos*, *pardos*, *criolos* and *cabras*, amongst other denominations (Netto, 2008)<sup>42</sup>, who worked as artisans, fishermen and suchlike, as well as slaves. Slavery was gradually abolished over the timespan of 30 years and four different laws. Brazil was the last country in the Americas to abolish slavery, in 1888.

Despite being a convergent space for many religions and cultures, especially for its strong slave trade, Brazil was a Catholic empire, according to its Political Constitution of 1824<sup>43</sup>. Therefore, the Catholic Church was as strong as the empire itself, and one of its strongest representations were the brotherhoods, beneficence organisations with a vast field of work. As each parish had its own church, each church housed its own brotherhoods, in the same scheme as Portugal. Brotherhoods were a very important component of death in Brazil at that time, and the next section is dedicated to them.

## 2 Securing a Good Death: Catholic Brotherhoods

During colonial times, the city of Salvador enjoyed a privileged position, concentrating figures of power, authority and wealth (Cardozo, 1947, p.12); therefore, it was only natural for religion and religious life to reflect this setting. The city was known for its numerous religious establishments, and many foreign

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<sup>41</sup> When the city of Brasília was constructed, with the purpose of being the capital of Brazil.

<sup>42</sup> Terms used to designate non-white people, according to the colour of their skin, to their place of birth or their ascendance, especially those with mixed-race parents.

<sup>43</sup> The fifth article says: "The Roman Catholic Religion will continue to be the religion of the Empire. All other religions are allowed within a familiar or private cult, in places for that intention, without exterior form of temple" (freely translated) (Constituição Política do Império do Brasil, 1824).

travellers were often impressed with its Catholic richness, with most churches ornate with artefacts from Rome.

A passage from John Turnbull's travel journal describes Brazil to be "one country in the world in which religion was fashionable, the churches being crowded with all ranks of people" (Turnbull, 1805, p.23). Religious life, moreover, was interwoven with daily life, a mix of sacred and profane, and Christianity's social function contributed to it. This, combined with Salvador's status as a place for the powerful and wealthy, made the city's religious brotherhoods particularly developed in comparison to others in the country.

Brotherhoods were broadly classified as "voluntary association of the faithful for charitable and pious ends", with its origins dating back to 13<sup>th</sup> century France (Cardozo, 1947, p.18), brought to Brazil by the Portuguese in the 16<sup>th</sup> century (Southey, 1801). When the first Portuguese brotherhoods were established is unknown, but documents trace them back to the 15<sup>th</sup> century. In Brazil, the first one was probably established at the same time as the founding of the city of Salvador<sup>44</sup> in 1549 (Cardozo, 1947).

The broad definition of brotherhoods as voluntary associations of lay men and women does not reflect their fundamental importance in the structural, social and cultural development of Brazil. They were also an integral part of its social history, and the work that was done by the government or church authorities in Spanish America, for example, was actually carried out by those religious brotherhoods in Brazil. As historian Gilberto Freyre has put it, this development was achieved "by private enterprise and not by official initiative; by laymen, and not by bishops nor by the clergy" (Freyre, 1940, p.92-93).

As a reflection of Brazilian society, brotherhoods were assembled for different publics, all dedicated to the worship of a particular saint. For example, some accepted aristocratic members only, others, only black people, while others were restricted to women, or unmarried men, and so on. They also divided themselves by trade, such as mechanics, musicians, lawyers, carpenters, students and physicians, to name a few. In addition, they could also be divided into four categories, according to Cardozo (1947): the first, concentrated solely on piety, also provided popular amusement in the form of religious processions

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<sup>44</sup> Then known as "town of Bahia".

on feast days or on the day dedicated to its patron saint. The second category is related to brotherhoods linked to trade, focused on annually honouring their patron saints. The third category belonged to more ambitious brotherhoods, demonstrating a higher degree of independence from the Catholic Church by sustaining themselves financially and by building their own churches, while also focusing on charity. In the fourth category were brotherhoods functioning as charitable institutions, primarily interested in caring for the sick, like the *Santa Casas de Misericórdia* (Holy Houses of Mercy). These are still active, linked to hospitals and their administration. One aspect that was common between these different types of brotherhoods was that nearly all were responsible for organising and conducting funerals for its deceased members.

But how were those brotherhoods sustained? Cardozo (1947) explains that, during colonial times, the Church was sponsored, in theory, by part of the procedures – tithes – from “all products of the soil” (p.21). The King, and not the Church itself, was responsible for collecting tithes, as stipulated by the Holy See. During colonial times, however, these were not enough to support the Church, so the Royal Treasury covered the difference. But as Brazil progressed economically, such procedures rapidly became more than enough, and the Crown started to set a portion of them aside to fund other activities.

This setting aside of funds gradually became a habit and ultimately an illegitimate and corrupted practice, which resulted in the Church depending more and more on the faithful and their donations to make up for what the Crown failed to pay them. Most of these donations came from the brotherhoods, also responsible for Bahia’s artistic wealth, a result of a healthy rivalry between them when it came to decorating their chapels (Cardozo, 1947). Some of these brotherhoods were seen as so important that plenary indulgences were granted by Pope Clement XI to the faithful who participated in their festivities (Cardozo, *idem*).

In his paper, Cardozo (*ibidem*) studied the records of the ‘Negro Brotherhood of St. Anthony of *Catagerona*’, established in 1699. The records show how that particular brotherhood was organised, which was surely similar to how other brotherhoods were organised in Brazil<sup>45</sup>. This one was administered

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<sup>45</sup> Differences would be based on the price of participation fees, eligibility and so on, depending on which of the four aforementioned categories the brotherhood belonged to.

by a judge, a scribe, a treasurer, a procurator and an unspecified number of minor officials, all elected by its members. Elections were hosted on the saint's<sup>46</sup> day, and office was served for a whole year.

Conditions of membership were established on that record; any person would be eligible, and an initiation fee of one *pataca*<sup>47</sup> was to be paid by those able to do so. Those who weren't, benefited from a reduced fee or even exemption, depending on the case.

All members were urged to say at least a rosary every day, in honour of the patron saint. Special masses were hosted on Wednesdays and on the saint's day, with the presence of two officials dressed in capes and bearing torches. Two procurators would be responsible for the collection of alms every Wednesday, and on the death of a member, all other members should accompany the funeral, and eight masses were to be said in his favour - in the case of death of an official of the brotherhood, the number increased to ten.

In addition, members should individually say a rosary in the deceased's honour. If a member failed to pay his dues for two years, masses and prayers were not offered. On the day following the patron's feasts, a gathering should be arranged for praying a rosary in honour of all deceased brothers. That document also designated the amounts paid to the brotherhood's priests for funeral services, and their role in assuring proper assistance to members in the hour of their death, which shows that the brotherhoods did much more than praying for its deceased members.

Kidder (1845), an American Methodist pastor visiting Brazil from 1837 to 1840 on a missionary assignment with the American Bible Society, described brotherhoods in Rio de Janeiro in a similar, but more concise way, by noting that they were

[...] composed of laymen and are denominated third Orders [...]. They have a style of dress approaching the clerical in appearance – it is worn on holidays, with some distinguishing mark by which each association is known. A liberal entrance fee and an annual subscription is required of all the members, each of whom is entitled to support from the general fund in sickness and in poverty, and also to a funeral of ceremony when dead. The brotherhoods contribute to the erection and support of churches,

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<sup>46</sup> Saint Anthony of Catagerona was likely a 15<sup>th</sup> century Franciscan from the convent of *Catalagirone*, in Sicily, and was never canonised (Cardozo, 1947).

<sup>47</sup> Or 320 *Réis*, a silver coin of 8.96 grams. It was in circulation from 1695 to 1834 (Prober, 1945).

provide for the sick, bury the dead, and support masses for the souls. In short, next after the state, they are the most efficient auxiliaries for the support of religious establishment in the country. Many of them, in the lapse of years, have become rich by the receipt of donations and legacies, and membership is highly prized (Kidder, 1845, p.79).

By taking care of its members in life and in death, brotherhoods secured them not only a decent burial, but also funeral attendance. It was a good thing to die surrounded by people, mostly family, friends and immediate neighbours, in the same European fashion described by Ariès (1985). Even if that did not happen, having as many observers and participants as possible, acquainted with the deceased or not, at the funeral, were also measures to secure a good death. These measures will be discussed now.

### **3 Brazilian Funerary Practises in the 1800's**

#### **3.1 Preparing for the *Velório*, a Brazilian Wake**

At the time of someone's death, the first step was to set up the house: decorate it with symbols and colours of death and prepare the corpse for the *velório*. According to Reis (2003), the first notice of death was issued by the *carpideiras* or wailing women. This notice served not only to inform neighbours of a death, but also to invite them to the rituals which would be starting shortly. This invitation would be to the deceased's community, making 19<sup>th</sup> century funerals popular and public rituals.

There is no indication as to how one would decide to attend a funeral, and it is safe to affirm that, despite open, this invitation would most certainly be responded to by those who were at least in the same social circle as the deceased. The custom of professional crying, a Mediterranean tradition, was not well perceived by some church members, who said the *carpideiras* were "capable of crying continually, in pure sorrow for any dead they had never seen before", and that "the more weeping there is, the more fame the funeral gains" (Reis, 2003, p.91).

Tears were expected not only from the *carpideiras*, but also from the female members of the family, friends and neighbours, during the *velório* itself. The latter would cry to express sympathy, but then, similar to the *carpideiras*, as a display of both obligatory feelings and ritual with the intention of purging evil spirits away

from the dead and the living (Reis, 2003, p.91). This lamentation, Reis observed, was even more evident when the deceased was young or if death was caused by an accident, or as a result of violence. According to Reis, who concentrated his work in the city of Salvador, the doors and windows of the home, closed during the deceased's last moments alive<sup>48</sup>, would be open to "facilitate the spirit's exit" (*idem*).

While travelling through Rio de Janeiro, American writer Thomas Ewbank noticed the opposite: "as soon as a person dies, the doors and windows are closed – the only occasion, it is said, when the front entrance of a Brazilian dwelling is shut" (Ewbank, 1856, p.67). The act of closing or opening doors and windows was indeed part of the Brazilian funerary custom, but it depended on the region. However, it would not prevent others from attending the following rituals; it was an indication that death had reached that household.

Preparing the body for the *velório* was a serious task. Washing, trimming of the hair, beard and nails were important as a guarantee that the spirit of the deceased would not wander around (Reis, 2003). However, that was not the only reason for the body to be thoroughly prepared: the *velório* was not just the last gathering with living relatives and friends, but also the first with the ancestors (*idem*). Only those initiated in the art handled the body, a routine found both in Africa and Europe. Ordinary people were not allowed to touch it, for they could also die. Ewbank (1856), who travelled to Brazil in the second portion of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, gave a description of other elements of the preparation for the *velório*:

The undertaker<sup>49</sup> is sent for [...], everything is left to him. The corpse is always laid out in the best room, is rarely kept over thirty-six hours, and not often over twenty-four – the number required by law. If the deceased was married, a festoon of black cloth and gold is hung over the street door; for unmarried, lilac and black; for children, white, or blue and gold. [...] Fond of dress while living, Brazilians are buried in their best, except when from religious motives other vestments are preferred. Punctilious to the last degree, they enforce etiquette on the dead. These must go into the next world in becoming attitudes and attire: married females draped in black, with black veils, their arms folded, and their hands resting on their opposite elbows; the unmarried, in white robes, veils, and chaplets of white flowers; their hands closed as in adoration, with palm branches between them. The hands of men and boys are crossed upon their breast, and, if not occupied with

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<sup>48</sup> As a means to prevent Satan from entering the place, a custom noted in Salvador (Reis, 2003).

<sup>49</sup> Possibly it is the way he understood brotherhood members to be.



other symbols, a small cup is placed in them, and removed at the tomb. Official characters are shrouded in official vestments, priests in their robes, soldiers in their uniforms, members of the brotherhoods in their albs, sisters of the same societies in those appropriate to them; e.g., those of the *Carmo* in black gowns, blue cloaks, and a blue slip for the head (Ewbank, 1856, p.67).

Completing the decoration of the house with the colour representing the identity of the deceased, letters of invitation for the funeral were sent by the wealthiest families. Before the arrival of the press in 1808, invitations were handwritten and delivered by people who were either especially hired for that purpose or by slaves and servants (Reis, 2003). Ewbank's accounts of Brazilian funerary customs actually start after he received such an invitation:

An invitation came from J--- to attend the obsequies of the *Condessa d'J---* at 6pm. The letter was bordered with symbols of death, and in the centre a shrouded urn, under which appeared the Lusitanian version of Horace's universal adage: 'pale Death with impartial tread beats at the poor man's cottage door and at the palaces of kings' (Ewbank, 1856, p.66).

British merchant and consul in Brazil, James Wetherell, was also invited to a funeral during his stay in the country and translated the invitation's wording on his accounts:

To the most illustrious J. W,

In the most grievous hour of her existence, Dona S. de A. V. R. begs to inform you that the Creator has been gracious enough to call to His eternal glory her well-beloved husband, Commodore J. J. R. And as his body is to be buried this afternoon at half-past three o'clock, in the church of the *Campo Santo*, she hopes you will not refuse to give to this pious and religious act your assistance at the *Piedade* Church, and afterwards at the cemetery (Wetherell, 1860, p.111).

For the wealthy, there was also the possibility of a funeral mass, a *Missa de Corpo Presente*, because burial for them would happen inside the church. This was mainly what the invitations were for, because such a mass and burial spot were also considered as status symbols.

The *velório* consisted of the body, without a coffin, arranged on top of a wooden structure called *tarimba*, placed in the best room in the house. Attendees gathered for a vigil – which could be as long as 36 hours, as noted by Ewbank (1846) – and prayers. Candlesticks were arranged in order to drive away bad spirits who could hover near the body and to help lighting the way, facilitating the

deceased's soul move into the spiritual world (Reis, 2003). *Velório*, the Portuguese word for wake, has its origins on the word *vela*, which means 'candle'. Its etymologic origin comes from the Latin *vigilare*: to invigilate, be vigilant. This idea of invigilating the dead is exactly what Brazilian *velórios* were, and still are.

Candles were an important part of the aforementioned 'arranging the house'. The amount, quality and size of candles and candlesticks reflected the deceased's financial and social status. Those with means would use their own or hire silver candlesticks, displaying thicker and longer candles; in extreme cases, the equivalent to half of the price of a large house would be spent in candles alone (Reis, 2003). The poor would use wood candlesticks, for example, holding shorter, thinner candles, in smaller quantities.

The importance of candles in *velórios* is related to them being a source of light for those in vigil during the night, for it would, along with the presence of people, provide protection against bad spirits. In addition, Brazilians believed candles could be used as means of communication: the dead could flicker the flames to indicate their presence (Cascudo, 2001), and the *velório* itself was considered a crucial period for the deceased's soul, because those without candles or people around them could become an easy prey for the devil (Reis, 2003).

Sometimes, the presence of people and the displaying of candles was not enough to ease the fear of evil forces, so a rosary was placed in the hands of the deceased along with another candle, which would also serve to light the way into the other side. This candle was supposed to be brand new, and it had to burn through to its end in order to ensure it would never be used again (Martins, 1983). It was understood that everything that touched the deceased belonged to the realm of the dead (Cascudo, 1956).

The way in which the body was positioned in the room where the wake took place was also important: "always with the feet pointing toward the street, keeping it in that direction when it is carried in the coffin. It goes to its grave feet first, the opposite of the way it entered the world" (Cascudo, 1956; cited by Reis, 2003, p.111). That was a precaution followed by other practices, like ensuring no sand or dust was left in the deceased's shoes, for the soul could be able to return to the world of the living, homesick.

Another important element in the setting of a *velório* was holy water. It was set to be sprinkled on the corpse by those who came to see it. That reflects a Portuguese custom, providing another protection from evil spirits who could turn the deceased's eyes black (Reis, 2003). Prayers were recited all the time along with the aforementioned crying performed by the women. It was also believed that the dead would be able to hear and address special requests from the living, who would ask for them to intercede in their favour or in favour of others who had died before.

There are contradictions on the serving of refreshments during the 19<sup>th</sup> century *velório*. Reis states that food and liquor were part of it as a reflection of both Portuguese and African customs, "fundamental for mobilizing and keeping people together" (Reis, 2003, p.112); however, in his contemporaneous account, Ewbank (1856, p.68) specified that no food was served, and it is possible that this disparity was due to cultural or social differences. Nevertheless, when the *velório* was over, it was time for the *cortejo* to start.

### **3.2 Cortejo, or Funeral Procession**

Religion was a good reason to belong to a brotherhood, but guaranteeing easier access to a coffin was certainly another one. This is because coffins were not part of *velórios* but, depending on the deceased's status, were only used to transport the body during the *cortejo*. Coffins were mostly owned by brotherhoods, who charged a fee for their utilisation. Colour coding was also present for this item, as described by Ewbank:

Coffins for the married are invariably black, but never for young persons; there are red, scarlet, or blue. Priests are inhumed or borne to the tomb in coffins on which a large cross is portrayed. Lay people cannot have the use of these. In fact, few persons, rich or poor, are actually buried in coffins; their principal use being to convey the corpse to the cemetery; and then, like the hearse, they are returned to the undertaker (Ewbank, 1856, p.67).

As Ewbank states again, the coffin would be returned "to the undertaker", or that is what he understood brotherhood members to be, who were mainly responsible for providing the funeral paraphernalia. It is possible that Ewbank interpreted them in the same professional sense they were understood in Europe, where he was from, or in the US, where he was living by that time. This was not

yet the case in Brazil and the possibility could be considered especially if one ponders the kind of people Ewbank must have interacted with during his stay in the country.

It is very likely that they were all from higher ranks in society, as suggested by the funeral invitation he received – from a Countess –, and the rich were very keen on participating in brotherhoods, both as a sign of their devotion and as a symbol of wealth and status. Anyway, Ewbank's description indicates that the individual would be buried with the shroud in which they were enveloped during the *velório* and not with the coffin, which was then returned to its owner and reused. Coffins only became more popular by the end of that century, after sanitary ideas gained more strength.

Those who carried the body through the door would also have to bear it through the *cortejo*, believing that they could be the next ones to die if they did not. The *cortejo* was conducted at a particular speed: if it was a hurried one, it could be an 'invitation' for other deaths. In addition, *cortejos* should not stop, especially in front of a house, otherwise "deadly misfortune would strike its residents" (Reis, 2003, p.119). Since the procession tended to happen at night, candles were also present during this ritual, symbolising the divine and the extinguishing of a life (Reis, 2003).

If the deceased was a member of a brotherhood, even more candles lit up the procession and more people interceded in their favour in the afterlife, through prayers. Members, dressed in their particular regalia, carried candles, and the brotherhood chaplain was supposed to light at least eight candles at the church before joining the *cortejo* (Reis, 2003).

Kidder (1845) described the funeral practices of children, wealthy adults and slaves. The difference he noted was that for the children the rituals happened during the day, decorated with white elements, an occasion considered to be "joyous, and the procession one of triumph" (p.174). In the case of wealthy adults, in addition to the house being decorated with black elements, the funeral procession generally happened at night, with an abundance of torchbearers. Still in regard to the funeral of children, Yorkshire merchant John Luccock was in Brazil from 1808 to 1818 and was once "asked" to help carry a little girl's coffin:

While standing at the gate of one of the chapels, the corpse of what had been a lovely girl was brought by four persons on a bier,

gaily dressed, and fully exposed as usual. As the first bearer on the left passed by me, he seized my right hand, and put into it the handle which he had held; the thing was done so suddenly that I found myself one of the supporters of the body, almost without knowing it. Being then ignorant of their ceremonies, and unwilling to give offence by not complying with them exactly, I gladly took advantage of some embarrassment, occasioned by the door-post, as we entered, to surrender the handle of the bier to a person withinside the chapel. Had I proceeded, however, it afterwards appeared, it would have been deemed a compliment to the deceased, and a gratification to her friends (Luccock, 1820, p.57).

Luccock's account of the funeral of children confirms its "joyous" and triumphal aspects later observed by Kidder (1845). After being invited to attend the obsequies of the *Condessa d'J*, Ewbank (1856) started asking his Brazilian colleagues about the funerary customs and noted a curious form of procession for those who died at a young age, already out of practise in larger cities by the time he visited the country:

Formerly it was customary to carry young corpses upright in procession through the streets, when, but for the closed eyes, a stranger could hardly believe the figure before him, with ruddy cheeks, hair blowing in the wind, in silk stockings and shoes, and his raiment sparkling with jewels, grasping a palm-branch in one hand and resting the other quite naturally on some artificial support, could be a dead child. But how was the body sustained in a perpendicular position? 'Generally, in this way', said *Senhora P* -, who had often assisted on such occasions: 'a wooden cross was fixed on the platform, and against it the body was secured by ribbons at the ankles, knees, and under the arms, and at the neck.' Twenty-five years ago, this practice was common. It is now confined chiefly to the interior (Ewbank, 1856, p.68).

Wetherell's impressions are equally interesting, for he noticed the behaviour of the participants in the *cortejo*:

At present, the body is conveyed in a hearse, and the mourners attend in carriages. [...] I am sure, from the indifference and apparent amusement of many of the people who ride in the carriages, - some of whom I have seen smoking cigars, that they deem it a comfortable and pleasing "out," many never having been in a carriage before. The hire of so many vehicles makes it very expensive. For very young people whose deaths are considered as subjects for rejoicing, the hearse and horses are gaily decorated with white and red plumes, etc., and a profusion of gilding. The corpse gaily dressed is exposed to view, surrounded with flowers and a gilt crown upon the head (Wetherell, 1860, p.111).

Wetherell also observed that if the deceased was a member of a brotherhood, him and his peers would be dressed in the brotherhoods' habits. Acquaintances, family and friends, all would march together in the sunset carrying candles, guided by the priests. The presence of strangers in the funeral procession caught the attention of Frenchman Ferdinand Denis, who observed that "everyone who is decently dressed, who passes in front of the dead person's house is invited to take a torch and go on to the burial" (Reis, 2003, p.119).

After the procession to the church, where most burials would happen, the burial itself would take place, in some cases, after a funeral mass. It is said that the family – some say only the women – of the deceased would never accompany the body to its grave, being it inside the church, churchyard or cemetery. In any case, this accompaniment would most certainly be done by those participating in the cortège and/or by the members of the deceased's brotherhood. It was also common for attendees to take whatever was left of the candles they received during the cortège to light up their own homes. In this custom also laid the hope, for the deceased, that prayers would continue to be said in their names (Martins, 2018).

### **3.3 Burial Practises, Religious Tolerance, Sanitary Reforms and Popular Uprising**

Before the 1860's and the strengthening of sanitary ideas, changes in how Brazilians were interred were already happening. At first, they were buried inside churches. According to Reis (2003), the first adjustment was made in wealthier churches, transferring burial sites from its floors to the walls, creating what is called charnels, or *carneiros*, in Portuguese. They were available, at first, only to their wealthy or socially important members. This primary transition socially reclassified the dead and their geographic position in the sacred space that the church represented, and their relationship with the living (Reis, *idem*). This change, however, was still not quite what medical authorities were hoping for.

The medical opinion of dead bodies being dangerous was already around in Brazil by 1825, when an imperial decree classified burial practices as anti-hygienic. Doctors were of the opinion that burials should only happen in cemeteries, which should be moved far away from the cities, preferably atop hills, in order to facilitate the dissipation of dangerous gases, or miasmas, a product of

decomposition. This view of the far away cemetery as the ideal, hygienic place for the dead was also accompanied by notions of romantic death, for not only the living would be favoured, but also the dead themselves. The dead would be free from the corruption of the city by being placed in a secluded environment, in touch with nature, in peaceful solitude, which would allow them to properly rest in peace; for the living, this would also mean they would be able to visit their dead in a peaceful and quiet surrounding, allowing them to say their goodbyes and prayers (Cardozo, 1947).

The 1825 decree was not enforced immediately because the ways in which cemeteries were viewed by Brazilians were not positive at all. The first ones were built by the 1820's, and they were places of burial for the pagan (which included non-baptised slaves), suicidal and unidentified persons. They were administrated by the state instead of the Church, and the main goal of the public cemetery was to avoid diseases from spreading, not to secure proper, religious burials.

Because of this, pious, righteous Brazilians did not want to be buried in cemeteries, a place for social outcasts. Two facts that strengthened the aversion to cemeteries were that they were, most of the time, not consecrated and distant from patron saints. Closeness to the relics of saints was an important factor for the preference of church burials, in the sense that the dead would benefit, by association and proximity, from the remains of saints or pious men and women.

Luccock (1820) once observed how the poor were interred in cemeteries when he was in Rio de Janeiro, an illustration of how horrible the situation was for those who could not benefit from church burials:

The poorer people, or at least the blacks, in these ultimate rites are treated with much less ceremony. Soon after death the body is sewed up in a coarse cloth, and intimation sent to one of the two burial-grounds appropriated to their use that a corpse is to be interred. Two men are then sent to the house, who place the body in a sort of hammock, suspend it upon a pole between them, and carry it through the streets in the same manner as they would walk with any common burden. If, in the line of their route, another or two should be ready for the same dreary home, these are put into the same hammock with the first, and conveyed, at the same time, to the graveyard. There a long trench is dug across it, six feet wide, and four or five deep; the bodies are thrown into it without ceremony of any kind, and laid straight across it in tiers, one above another, so that the head of one lies on the feet of that immediately below it, and in this manner the black unreflecting and insensible Sextons proceed, until the trench is nearly filled; earth is then

thrown in, and raised above. It is almost needless to add that at these Cemeteries the most disgusting scenes were sometimes beheld by those who chose to explore them, that the offensive smell was almost intolerable, and until a reform took place they seriously threatened the health of the city (Luccock, 1820, p.56-57).

It was the fear of having such a terrible end that incentivised slaves and the poor to be part of brotherhoods, for that would secure them a burial in a church, or at least something closer to a proper burial. In Salvador, most slaves who did not belong to a brotherhood, for example, were buried in a cemetery maintained by the *Santa Casa* charity hospital (Reis, 2003).

On the other hand, those who did not need to worry about dreadful common graves in cemeteries would indicate in which church and where in that church they would like to be buried. The practise was so common that even former slaves would also indicate their desire right after adhering to a brotherhood.

Therefore, former slaves were also free to choose how they wanted their burial to be. The selected church was normally located in the parish where one had lived, or, if that was the case, in the church housing the brotherhood they were part of. This choice was made for “the spirit of community was projected beyond death. People wanted to be buried in a familiar territory, in the environment they have lived in, close to those they have shared their lives with” (Reis, n.d.).

The desire to be buried in a familiar place marks the convergence between birth and death, a closure. The choosing of specific churches were related to personal devotion, inserted in a domestic territory: “The value of the proximity between house and grave repeats the conception of death as continuity. One died for the eternal life” (Reis, *idem*).

The parish church provided some – but not enough – space for the growing population to be buried within their own neighbourhoods. Nevertheless, that change in how the dead were placed inside churches, with the creation of charnels, influenced not just the separation between the living and the dead at a ritual level, but also the institution of the cemetery as the common destination for all people.

An imperial law from 1828 was established to prohibit church burials throughout Brazil, but the practice continued because there was a strong bond



between funerals and brotherhoods (and the Church, consequently). The law was seen as a threat to this very bond.

The Church, however, was favourable to a gradual change, to some extent, because there was a certain worry about the way Brazilians were devoted to their dead, which the Church feared could lead to the reintroduction of pagan notions of ancestry. That prohibition also contributed, in Reis' (2003) view, to the creation of a new funerary sensibility in the Brazilian culture, which was until then viewed as excessive and filled with pageantry and opulence, especially in the eyes of foreigners (Luccock, 1820, Ewbank, 1856).

This view was shared only by a small – but powerful – circle of Brazilians, mainly composed of physicians and politicians, who agreed that “only the physician’s specialized knowledge could raise Brazil to the level of civilized Europe” (Reis, 2003, p.217). These ideas gained strength after the institutionalisation of medicine and public hygiene, with the creation of medical schools and societies in the country, in 1808 and 1829, respectively, leading to a series of measures to change the population’s daily practices, especially those related to death (Reis, 2003, Vailati, 2010). The shift in the way death and the dead body were perceived – from a public and social element, to a private and individualised one – happened mainly through the development of medical knowledge and technologies rather than through religion, or laicism, for that matter, which was the determining changing factor in some European countries.

Medicine’s alliance with politics, in the shape of sanitation policies (Reis, 2003), was the main factor in the gradual, seemingly desacralisation of death in Brazil. Initially, through subtle changes: for example, in how the dead body was called; from ‘defunct’, under the strong influence of religion, to ‘cadaver’. Under the different denomination, the dead body gained new perspectives (Rodrigues & Franco, 2011), making way for drastic measures, such as the prohibition of church burials, in an attempt to follow the European lead: France prohibited them in 1804, England and Wales in 1840 and Portugal in 1844. The improvement of public health through adequate sanitation was the main objective, as noted by Reis (2003).

Moreover, Europe had a direct influence in Brazil, especially France, as it was considered by Brazilian doctors as the beacon of civilisation (*idem*). Up to 1808, when the first medical-chirurgical school was inaugurated, Brazilian

doctors were mainly educated on the old continent, and, after the creation of the country's first medical institutions in Rio and Salvador, its professors and the elite – where politicians came from – still had European training, notably from Portugal, Scotland, Italy and, of course, France, and were the providers of the manuals used in training Brazilian doctors, notably those in Salvador (*ibidem*).

France was responsible for introducing the main ideas that would influence the shift in how the dead were perceived. Through the teachings of Pinel and Pasteur (Online Encyclopedia of Death and Dying, n.d.), diseases were then seen as natural, potentially epidemic disorders, and no longer as a form of divine punishment (Reis, 2003). As a development of the concept of miasma, popular in the previous century, the dying and the dead were at the top of the list of causes for potential epidemics.

Doctors in Brazil started a cultural revolution, sanitarily reorganising not just hospitals and cemeteries, but also prisons and schools, which were then, by the second half of the 1800s, understood as the originators of both physical and spiritual maladies (Reis, 2003). This revolution was endorsed and supported by politicians, for one of the aims of medical societies such as the Imperial Academy of Medicine, in Rio de Janeiro, was to advise the government on public health issues (Reis, 2003).

But the revolution was slow and more akin to the gradual change supported by the Church than to the ideas of doctors and politicians. This was largely because brotherhoods were the main protagonists in caring for the dying and the dead and, though the construction of new and approved cemeteries was already underway, there were no direct measures to construct and establish enough, proper cemeteries for all who needed them. Thus, church interments continued. By 1855, a cholera epidemic devastated the state of Bahia and some brotherhoods were worried about the monetary loss the church burial prohibition would cause them<sup>50</sup>, while doctors and politicians saw the epidemic as an opportunity to further develop their sanitation projects and ban church interments for good (David, 1996).

In the meantime, the unfinished, unprepared cemeteries were seen as a terrible alternative, far from the decency and security provided by the Church, its

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<sup>50</sup> Many depended on funeral and charnel fees to function.

proximity and rituals. Documents from the *Santa Casa de Misericórdia*<sup>51</sup> in Maragogipe<sup>52</sup> show that, in that locality, between 1855 and 1861, bodies were being deposited in a makeshift cemetery which did not allow proper funerary rituals to be carried out. The *Santa Casa* itself had to make claims to the government in order to build a proper cemetery because bodies were being placed in a field which also served as pasture (Nascimento, 2013).

This shows that the law prohibited church burials for public health reasons but did not quite provide the proper apparatus for substituting them, either from a healthy, practical or ritualistic point of view. It is quite possible that the precarious situation in Maragogipe was common in other parts of the country during that time, which strengthens the resistance with which the reformation was received by the population.

Eight years after the 1828 sanction prohibiting interments in churches was published, the Brazilian tradition had not changed. However, the people of Salvador decided they would not see their values reformed by laws, and a popular uprising known as *Cemiterada* happened.

### **3.3.1 “Death to the Cemetery!”: Revolt and Religion**

The *Cemiterada* uprising took place in Salvador a day before another law prohibiting church burials, in 1836, came into effect. The law also granted a 30-year monopoly to the private company who administered the new cemetery, named *Campo Santo*, completely overturning the brotherhoods. The uprising began as a protest organised by brotherhoods and third orders from Salvador. The protesters went into the Municipal Square, home of the council chambers and seat of the provincial government. Others, who had no relation to brotherhoods or the Church, also joined in for hearing and giving speeches attacking the cemetery and the *cemeteristas* – those who supported the prohibition of church burials.

A petition was delivered to the government, along with several appeals from the brotherhoods; still protesters invaded the governmental palace, leading to the suspension of the ban on church burials until the 7<sup>th</sup> of November of that year. After this agreement, the crowd started to disperse with the help of the police, but

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<sup>51</sup> Which, as aforementioned, was a type of brotherhood focused on caring for the sick.

<sup>52</sup> Maragogipe is a small town close to Salvador.

the demonstration did not end there. The administrative offices of the *Campo Santo* cemetery, located in that very square, were stoned. The crowd cried slogans which started with “Long live the faith!” and “Long live the brotherhoods!”, but it soon escalated to clamouring death to the cemetery administrators, to the Freemasons, and lastly, “Death to the Cemetery!”.

Around 3,000 people (Reis, 2003) decided to go to the *Campo Santo* cemetery itself, armed with axes, crowbars and other apparatuses. Everything was destroyed either by force or fire. Theoretically, the cemetery was open, but not yet ready for business. Reports exempted the brotherhoods from any involvement in the destruction, which is believed to be untrue (Reis, *idem*). The upheaval continued after nightfall, with parts of the cemetery being hurled into the city and exposed as trophies by the crowd.

The following morning, crowds fled to see the remains of the cemetery: “the majority seemed to feel joyful at the demolition of an institution they believed to signify the destruction of the Catholic faith” (Reis, 2003, p.11). The biggest reason for the resistance, illustrated by the *Cemiterada*, was not only the certainty that the reformation was attacking their religion and religious practices, as expressed in Reis’ work, but also their popular beliefs. Both were interwoven in Brazilian culture as a whole.

An example of how intertwined religion and beliefs could become when referring to death rituals is found in Robert Walsh’s (1830) account. In 1828, the same year of the first sanction against church burials, a German Lutheran General Mining Association (GMA) employee died in an accident in a village in the interior of Minas Gerais<sup>53</sup>. Walsh, an Irish Anglican reverend, observed that despite the village’s progress, the locals were not very open to strangers and were prejudiced against their different faiths (Walsh, 1830, p. 92).

Nonetheless, the prejudice, says Walsh, was encouraged by the outdated ideas of the old, local vicar (*idem*). Subsequently, though the Brazilian Empire was Catholic and declared to be permissive in the cult of other religions, the vicar forbade the internment of the German worker in the parish, claiming that as a Lutheran, he was a heretic and not eligible for burial in consecrated ground. That

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<sup>53</sup> In the Southeast of Brazil.

attitude was despised by the local gentlemen who did not share the vicar's point of view but could not intervene in the situation (Walsh, *ibidem*).

Therefore, the GMA allowed the burial to take place inside its headquarters' gardens. Two days after Walsh's arrival in the village, he was approached by those "gentlemen" and, on the following Sunday, he proceeded to consecrate the site where the dead worker was buried. Despite the miasmatic ideas of the time, Walsh opened the grave and gave the dead miner the proper rituals denied by the vicar. His actions, together with the presence of fellow miners and other villagers – and the support given by the "gentlemen" who were late and missed the service – contributed to bring together three different faiths: Lutheran, Anglican and Catholic, in order to provide a proper funeral service (Rodrigues, 2013, p.17).

The fear instilled by the prohibition of church burials resided in the fact that people did not know if they would be able to carry on with their rituals around death as well. As aforementioned, Brazilians were quite superstitious. In the following century, superstition declined with the removal of death and the dead from the bosom of society, who were finally buried in distant cemeteries. This originated new behaviours and the remodelling of funeral practices.

#### **4 Death in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Brazil, an Overview**

As the 1900's came to an end, Brazil was on the right track for finally being as 'organised' as sanitariat doctors had envisioned it. One of the main conquests was that cemeteries were at last accepted as the only places for burial, which triggered the loss of the monopoly on death held by the Catholic Church and its brotherhoods until then. By the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, death was, undoubtedly, no longer a predominantly religious trade, but an established professional one, the result of a gradual and slow change which gained momentum when Brazil ceased to be an empire and became a republic, in 1888 (Rodrigues, 2014).

Protestantism, affirm Mellor & Shilling (1993), was responsible for the privatisation of death by reducing Catholicism's apparatus in Europe, displacing death from its communal context. This was achieved, for example, by the weakening of rituals like the Requiem Mass and the display of the body at home before disposal, which were synergic moments between the living and the dead.

Brazil, founded as a Portuguese colony, inherited its Catholic beliefs and its establishment as a Catholic republic withheld Protestant reformations from reaching the country at the same pace as it did in some parts of Europe. Therefore, through the second half of the 19th century, Brazil remained strongly attached to Catholic beliefs and practices, to the extent of this attachment being considered a barrier to the country's development, and its elaborate rituals being compared to grandiose pagan performances of Egyptian and Babylonian origin (Ewbank, 1856).

Thus, Brazilians' behaviour towards death was first and foremost Catholic, despite the interaction and synergy with other religions or faiths, either from the native indigenous people or introduced by foreigners (including Protestantism, but also Judaism and Adventism) and slaves (*Umbanda* and Islamism, for example).

The influx of different faiths and practices contributed to the country's cultural melting pot, which included, of course, different ways to deal with death and originated to the different approaches to it that can still be found nationwide. However, in the late 1800's, the same practices which were then being repressed in Europe – the wake and the funeral mass –, continued to be key points for the Brazilian way of death up to the end of the 20th century.

If both Protestantism and medicalisation combined to desacralise death in Europe, its sequestration and disappearance from public view was only possible after medicine transformed death in a technical matter (Giddens, 1991) not only on that continent, but also in Brazil. However, modernisation was unable to substitute religious certainties with science (Mellor & Shilling, 1993), both in Europe and in Brazil, creating a gap where traditional configurations of behaviour used to be (Elias, 2001) and leaving individuals alone to deal with death in an increasingly informal way.

This led people to become insecure around death and dying, especially because it was by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Europe, and by the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Brazil, that the hospital started to become the dwelling of death, under medical care and with much reduced proximity to others beyond the medical staff (Walter, 1991a). Hospitals became the main place for dying, removing death from the public eye (Koury, 2014), instilling a fear of contamination, especially in urban Brazil. In urban areas, death as a whole

became private with the aid of medical discourse, much similarly to what is described by Walter (1991) in the European context.

As the 20<sup>th</sup> century progressed, wailing women were no longer popular, paper invitations to funerals were no longer sent, houses were no longer decorated to invite neighbours to the *velório*. After the removal of the dead from the bosom of community life, *velórios* began to be organised only for those closest to the deceased and their family, and the *velório* itself increasingly lost its place at the deceased's home. One of the main reasons for this is that housing in Brazil became increasingly vertical. Houses gave way to apartment buildings.

Another meaningful result of the development of the Brazilian funeral industry in the 1900's was the introduction of more affordable coffins, which started to be present throughout the *velório*, intended for a single use, with the body being displayed and buried inside of it. Cremation was also introduced as an alternative for disposal, though not as popular as burials<sup>54</sup>. As the child mortality rate decreased to levels more consistent with the country's still slow, but gradual development, the death of children stopped being celebrated in urban, developed areas, though it remained as common, and even joyous as before, in the majorly impoverished countryside (Scheper-Hughes, 1992).

In addition, funerals became "progressively quicker" (Koury, 2014, p.597), and public demonstrations of grieving declined in popularity but remained present until the 1960's. In the 1970's, behaviours linked to the previous century started to be seen as retrograde, dissonant from the urban lifestyle which was now the norm in large Brazilian centres. During the 1970's, families started to decrease in size, and sons and daughters started leaving home when reaching young adulthood (Koury, 2014).

This, combined with the social and technical development experienced during the 1980's and 90's, contributed to transforming Brazilian society in an individualistic way, increasing feelings of loneliness and strengthening the idea of a need for emotional containment, in life and in death. But the definition of emotional containment to Brazilians, when it comes to death, is very different from other countries, and public demonstrations of pain and suffering related to the loss of a loved one continued to occur, even in metropolises.

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<sup>54</sup> But this introduction was quite late. The first crematory in Brazil opened only in 1974, in the city of São Paulo.

The ways in which funerals are currently organised are a result of the ways established in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, now understood as traditional. As they were explained at length in the Literature Review chapter, they will not be explored further here. New ways to deal with death, however, have flourished in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and these are going to be addressed in the next chapter.

## 5 Summary

This chapter has shown that 19<sup>th</sup> century Brazilian funerals were mostly under the responsibility of brotherhoods, religious organisations of lay men and women. They were in charge of taking care of the dead body, preparing it for the wake, while families decorated homes that invited the neighbourhood for the rites. In addition to decorating the home with signs of death, paper invitations were sent in order to increase attendance at the funeral, mostly the cortège and burial. It was common to hire *carpideiras*, or wailing women, to cry for the deceased, and the body was placed in a raised platform for its duration, surrounded by candles.

When the time for the cortège arrived, carriages were hired as a display of wealth in the case of adults, who were buried during the night, and of joy in the case of children, buried during the day. Coffins were another hired item, used only as a vessel to transport the body to its final resting place, which normally was inside the church, and then returned to the brotherhoods to be reused. Not only was the funeral a public event, but strangers were expected and welcomed to it, as shown by the accounts of several foreigners who visited Brazil during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

By describing funerary rituals in Brazil during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was possible to observe how they started to change when sanitary ideas were introduced in the country. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, medical technology finally succeeded in sequestering death from the Brazilian social core, a process that started in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as demonstrated in this chapter. A brief timeline of the changing of Brazilian death-ways was also drawn:

- 1825 – Imperial decree which deemed burial practices as anti-hygienic;
- 1828 – 1<sup>st</sup> Law prohibiting church burials;
- 1808 - 1829 – First medical schools and societies were founded;
- 1836 – 2<sup>nd</sup> Law prohibiting church burials;
- 1836 – The public revolt known as *Cemiterada* happened.



Then, the chapter concluded with a brief overview of the establishment of the new death-ways during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with burials being finally restricted to cemeteries, with brotherhoods being replaced by undertakers in the dealing with the dead, with the gradual medicalisation of death and with the distancing of the dead with the removal of cemeteries to the outskirts of the cities. In this sense, despite the many changes that occurred in the 1900's, it is possible to say that it was a quiet period in comparison to the previous one, death-wise. Once established, the 20<sup>th</sup> century Brazilian death-ways did not change. As a whole, in urban areas, attitudes towards death, as well as towards mourning, became private and "discreet" (Koury, 2014) in a very Brazilian way.

## **Chapter 4: Death in 21st Century Brazil: An Introduction to the Dead People Profiles Community**

This chapter revolves around the Internet in 21<sup>st</sup> century Brazil, focusing on its death related uses. First, it will concentrate directly on the 21<sup>st</sup> century through the establishment and structure of a social network site called Orkut, one of the main catalysts for the propagation of the Internet in the country. While doing so, the history of the Internet in Brazil will be generally addressed, still focusing on its uses for death related issues. In addition, the community in which this thesis focuses on originated on Orkut, so which is why it is important to address this online social network first, before exploring its move to Facebook, which will be done in the next chapter.

Next, the *Profiles de Gente Morta* (PGM) or 'Dead People Profiles' community<sup>55</sup> will be introduced. It will detail how PGM started on Orkut, explaining its rules and peculiarities, possibilities of interaction between its members and tracing a general profile of them. It is very important to understand how the community was structured on Orkut, to understand why it can be seen as a new space for social interaction related to death and dying. Information on its members is necessary for painting a picture of who they were, why they were interested in visiting profiles of deceased Orkut users, and later on watching the virtual wakes of strangers.

Since Orkut was deactivated by Google in 2014 and is no longer available for reference, this chapter is structured around previous research on PGM, combining material published in my Bachelor's (Martins, 2009) and Master's dissertations (Martins, 2013), and on unpublished data collected between 2008 and 2014.

### **1 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Death and the Internet in Brazil**

The Internet was founded in the end of the 1950's by the United States' Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA), directly linked to the country's Department of Defence. At first, it was a military tool, but by the 80's it had

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<sup>55</sup> On Orkut, PGM was a community. On Facebook, it is a group. Both names are in accordance with how they were defined by the social network sites themselves. From this point onwards, they are referred to as community in the Orkut context, and as group in the Facebook context.

developed into an academic one as well. Academia was what made it possible for the Internet to arrive in Brazil: by the end of the 1980's, the Fermilab (Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory), in the U.S., was directly linked to a research foundation in the city of São Paulo (*Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado de São Paulo*, FAPESP).

Both institutions were connected by a submarine copper cable, which enabled the use of the Internet in Brazil. This connection was the only “way out” for the country’s data into the world (Arruda, 2011). By 1990, the Brazilian Network of Research (*Rede Nacional de Pesquisa*, RNP) was founded in order to link other Brazilian universities to the service; the “.br” domain was established, and in the subsequent years, the connectivity grew between Brazilian universities (Arruda, *idem*).

Only four years after the creation of the World Wide Web (WWW) and the first browser, Mosaic, in 1990, commercialisation of the Internet finally became possible for Brazilians. At first, only five thousand users were chosen by the Brazilian Agency of Telecommunications (*Agência Brasileira de Telecomunicações*, EMBRATEL) to test the service. By 1995 the service was definitive and accessible to the general public, and in 1998 Brazil ranked as the 19<sup>th</sup> country in the world and the first in South America for its number of Internet hosts.

From then on, the Internet’s worldwide power and influence grew so much that it has defined new ways to interact and communicate, amongst many other activities; death, of course is included (Walter, 2015). The Internet’s role as a facilitator for discussions on death and dying grew along with its development, especially after the increase in interactivity by the end of the 1990’s. Until then, the creation of online content was only available through specialised companies or individuals, and in the beginning of the 2000’s, average users were able to produce content themselves, thanks to the expansion of user-friendly platforms.

Thus, death online started to appear in other instances rather than in news-related environments only. Discussion forums in online support groups and blogs about life-threatening diseases (Walter *et al*, 2011), mourning experiences, and dealing with suicide and overdose cases, to name a few, started to appear across the world. In Brazil, this appearance also included blogs and sites dedicated to cataloguing images of death. These sites focus on hosting pictures and videos of

traffic accidents, executions by Brazilian drug dealers or the Islamic State, necropsy images, bodies from victims of violence *in situ* and any material which could be classified as 'gore'<sup>56</sup>.

The Oxford Living Dictionary defines the word gore as "blood that has been shed, especially as a result of violence", having its origins in the Old English word 'gor', which means 'dung', 'dirt'. Its Germanic origin also includes Dutch and Swedish words which mean 'muck', 'filth'. The current sense of the word, which is used in this thesis, dates from the mid-16th century (Oxford Living Dictionary, n.d.).

Gore sites persist because of another behaviour, related to death online, which is quite particular to Brazil: it is very common, after a fatal car crash, for example, to find a group of people gathered around the body, waiting for the authorities or supervising their work. With the advent of smartphones, such scenes began to be photographed, recorded, and shared online (Martins, 2016). The most popular place for these images to be shared in the country is a website called *Cabuloso*<sup>57</sup>. It was created in 2005 and it claims that its mission is to "show life as it is", to serve as an educational tool for medical students and to raise awareness of the dangers of careless driving, for example.

However, on its terms of use<sup>58</sup>, the website claims it only publishes images under the consent of families or under the Brazilian law regarding drivers' education, but it is difficult to determine if this directive is actually being followed, especially if the image or footage was taken in the streets and before the arrival of authorities<sup>59</sup>. Nevertheless, the use of the Internet for death related issues in Brazil was strengthened by the introduction of social media websites like Orkut, which will be addressed in the next topic.

Later, as the Internet grew even more in popularity in Brazil, certain types of amateur news blogs and sites were created. These try to copy the style of

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<sup>56</sup> There are similar sites in the English-speaking world, like BestGore.com, Ogrish.com and Rotten.com, to name a few.

<sup>57</sup> *Cabuloso* is a slang, so it is very difficult to translate. But roughly it means 'unlucky', 'unfortunate'.

<sup>58</sup> Available at <https://goo.gl/73StN4>. Accessed 12.09.2017.

<sup>59</sup> In August 2014, the brother of a friend died in a motorcycle accident, and images of it quickly appeared online. As we were trying to comfort his family, I was informed of the existence of these images by other friends. My friend who lost his brother saw some of those images and was extremely distressed, a horrifying experience which added to his grief and certainly contributed to an episode of depression. On top of supporting a friend in grief, our lawyer friends also had to deal with legal procedures to remove those images from the Internet as quickly as possible.

traditional news websites, sometimes literally copying and pasting reports. Others are just composed of transcriptions from police reports. But since these blogs and sites are run by amateurs and not by credentialed journalists, they are less careful and more obvious when reporting certain deaths, especially suicides. They also feature images and videos of accidents as part of their reporting, going completely against the ethics of Brazilian press.

## **2 Orkut, an Overview**

Orkut was Google's first social network site project. In ten years of existence it became the most popular SNS in Brazil. Created in January 2004 and named after one of its idealisers, Google Turkey engineer Orkut Büyükkökten, the social network proposed to strengthen friendships and create new ones through a profile, which enabled the exchange of messages and publication of photos and videos (Figure 6).

Accessing Orkut at first was only possible through invitations, distributed amongst Gmail<sup>60</sup> users. Each user was given 20 invitations, and as Orkut's popularity grew, some of those were even sold (Badô, 2004). Following this trend, Google increased the number of invitations per user to 100. In 2005, Orkut became available in Portuguese, which contributed to the website's rise in popularity in Brazil.

After receiving an Orkut invitation, the user should build their profile, the tool which enabled interaction with other users. Profiles were composed of a profile picture<sup>61</sup> and the information provided was divided into three sections: social, professional and personal (Figure 7). In the Social section were specified likes and dislikes (e.g. favourite books, music, TV shows, movies and more); the professional section could show the owner's profession or occupation and level of education, and the personal section was to facilitate interpersonal relationships. As such, it featured information like skin or hair colour and relationship status.

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<sup>60</sup> Google's email provider.

<sup>61</sup> Sometimes also referred to as 'avatar'.



Users were connected through friendship requests and each profile was limited to a maximum of a thousand friends. Those who reached that maximum number of connections would create extra profiles to accommodate the remainder of friends. Each profile had an individual page for messaging: a “Scrapbook”, where the messages – “scraps” – were written.

Initially, scraps were not private, as scrapbooks could be accessed by anyone visiting a profile on Orkut, even those who were not connected as friends; therefore, it was up to recipients or authors to preserve or remove the scraps. Many eliminated the scraps after reading them to maintain privacy, leaving a permanent scrap which informed: “I read, answer and erase”<sup>62</sup>.

Only in 2010 Orkut decided to offer privacy options for scraps. Before then, if one wanted to send a private message, this could be done as a “Testimonial”, originally a message of endorsement which needed to be reviewed by the profile owner before approving it to become public. At first, users could only upload a maximum of 12 photos. Later, that was expanded to 10,000 (Hamann, 2011), and in 2007 it became possible to add videos from YouTube, send scraps through SMS, create polls and perform searches inside communities, amongst other features which promoted different ways of interacting within Orkut.

## **2.1 Communities**

Communities were one of the ways of interacting, discussion forums for various subjects, spanning from musical preferences to hobbies or politics. Communities were created by Orkut’s own members and were one of the most popular features in the social network site. The creator of a community was responsible for managing it and became the community owner, responsible for establishing its level of privacy.

An open community signified that any Orkut member could join. For the closed ones, the new member needed to be approved by the community owner. There was no limit of participants for a community, but a user could create up to a thousand communities, which at first had two areas of interaction: the forum, which listed the topics of discussion, and an events page.

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<sup>62</sup> “Leio, respondo e apago”, in Portuguese.

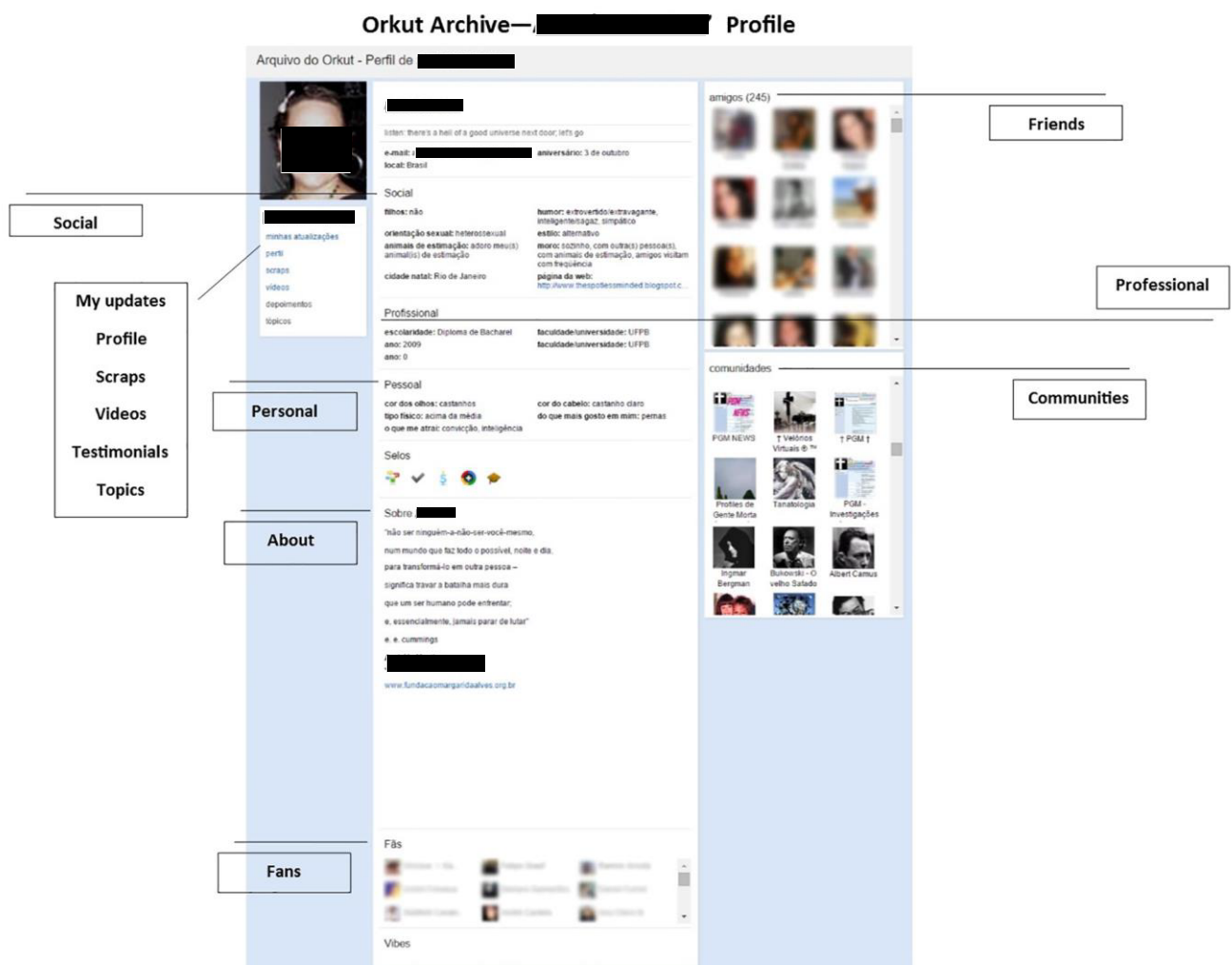


Figure 7- The structure of an Orkut profile (2009)



A community forum worked through the creation of topics. A community member could propose a subject for discussion by providing at least a title for the topic, which allowed others to read it and reply, if desired, creating a thread. The events page was used to promote events such as off-line gatherings or parties which could either be related to the community's theme or not.

In 2006, it became possible for the community owner to appoint up to ten moderators who would help manage it, or authorise the entry of new members, in the case of a closed community. Members could be temporarily excluded or permanently banned by the owner or moderators, according to Orkut's or the community's own rules. Exclusion meant that the member was removed from the community but could ask to join it again. Banning was permanent, therefore returning was not possible under the same profile. A banned individual would have to create a different profile in order to re-enter a community.

Finding friends or communities could be achieved through Orkut's search engine, a database of millions of communities and profiles. Profiles could be searched by using filters linked to details provided by users on their profile. Searching for communities could be done through a single term or by browsing through Orkut's 28 community categories.

With the appearance of legal problems involving racism, paedophilia and piracy in different Orkut Brazil communities, in 2008 Orkut's headquarters were transferred to the country, where 54% of its members were from (Folha, 2008).

### **3 The *Profiles de Gente Morta* Community**

If the topics covered by Orkut's communities were so extensive that they contemplated illegality, like the aforementioned, it is not surprising that a noble subject such as death had a dedicated community as well. Therefore, *Profiles de Gente Morta*<sup>63</sup> or 'Dead People Profiles' was created on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of December 2004. Basically, it was structured as any other Orkut community, but its aim was to catalogue the profiles of deceased Orkut users. For this reason, it was a closed community, meaning that membership needed to be approved by the owner, and later, moderators, and the topics of the community could only be seen by its members.

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<sup>63</sup> Original name in Portuguese

As briefly mentioned in the Methodology chapter, the translated description of the community is going to be included here, as well as other descriptions of and related to the community itself, instead of placing them as annexes. This is because they are extremely important for understanding how the community worked and what was expected of its members. The Dead People Profiles community was described as follows, as shown in Figure 8:

This community is dedicated to the research of profiles of people who died. Here we see how suddenly our life ends and everything is left behind, including trivialities like Orkut, Photolog, MSN, etc. But these trivialities can, in turn, become 'virtual tracks'. But what are these tracks? Are they useful? Do they give comfort to those who stay? Can they concede a virtual immortality? Well, we're here to discuss... We want you to post the profiles of someone you know – or don't know - who has died. It is not allowed to be malicious and disrespect the dead. I also make it clear that I am against any kind of violence or supporting death in this community. I want everyone to rest in peace...

Guilherme Dorta

Before entering, please read the rules: (link to the Moderation community)

As a catalogue of obituaries (Martins, 2009; 2013), the community's description emphasises how virtual activities like having an account on Orkut itself or on blogs and chat applications<sup>64</sup> could leave traces of oneself after death.

The description classifies those traces as "virtual tracks" and questions their usefulness after the death of its owner and invites members to contribute by posting profiles of Orkut users who were either known or unknown to them, in order to feed the community database, and begins to outline some rules. Such rules relate to the rejection of malicious behaviour, understood as disrespectful towards the dead. The community's owner points out that he does not support violence nor seek to "support death" - in the sense influencing members to commit suicide or homicide -, with the creation of that space, because he wants "everyone to rest in peace".

The name of the owner ends the description, in the fashion of a signature, along with the request for those interested in joining the community to carefully read its rules, available on another community's page called *PGM Moderação*<sup>65</sup>, for which he provided the link.

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<sup>64</sup> Like Fotolog or MSN Messenger, popular social media platforms at the time.

<sup>65</sup> Also referred to as 'PGM Moderation' in this work.

[Web](#)
[Mapas](#)
[Notícias](#)
[Orkut](#)
[Tradutor](#)
[Livros](#)
[Gmail](#)
[mais](#)

[configurações](#)
[versão antiga](#)
[sair](#)

**orkut**

[página inicial](#)
[perfil](#)
[scraps](#)
[comunidades](#)

**PGM - Profiles de Gente Morta**  
(84.002 membros)

[deixar comunidade](#)  
[promova](#)  
[denunciar abuso](#)  
[fórum](#)  
[enquetes](#)  
[eventos](#)  
[membros](#)

## PGM - Profiles de Gente Morta

Início > Comunidades > Outros > PGM - Profiles de Gente Morta

**descrição:** =====  
 Essa comunidade é dedicada a pesquisa de perfis (perfil) de gente que faleceu.  
  
 Aqui vemos como, de uma hora para a outra, nossa vida acaba e deixamos tudo para trás, inclusive banalidades como Orkut, Fotolog, MSN, etc...  
 Banalidades essas que, por vez, podemos chamar de "rastros virtuais".  
  
 Mas o que são esses rastros?? Seriam eles úteis?? Um conforto para quem fica?? Uma imortalidade virtual??  
  
 Bom, estamos aí para discutir...  
  
 Queremos que vc poste o profile de algum conhecido seu que tenha falecido ou algum profile que vc conheça.  
  
 Não é permitido brincadeiras de má intenção, bem como falta de respeito com os mortos.  
  
 Deixo claro também que sou contra qualquer tipo de violência e jamais faço apologia a morte aqui nessa comunidade.  
  
 Sem mais, desejo que todos descansem em paz...  
  
 Ass.: Guilherme Dorta  
  
 =====  
**ANTES DE ENTRAR, LEIA AS REGRAS EM:** <http://www.orkut.com.br/Main#CommMsgs.aspx?cmm=65537209&tid=5235757002899152661>  
  
 idioma: **Português (Brasil)**  
 categoria: **Outros**  
 dono: **Dorta Moderador**  
 moderadores: **Guilherme, Silvia ▾, Fabiana, >>> Juli <<<**  
 tipo: **moderada**  
 privacidade do conteúdo: **apenas membros**  
 local: **Brasil**  
 criado em: **23 de dezembro de 2004**  
 membros: **84.002**

**membros (84002)**

[ver membros >](#)

**comunidades relacionadas**

Sou viciado na ↑PROFILES↑ (1.277)

Eu já chorei lendo a PROFILES (1.910)

Gente Morta Sem Profile (2.108)

PGM - Já foi postado? (189)

Não ao RIP E DEP nos profiles (211)

Se eu morrer me enterra na PGM (2.007)

↑ Velórios Virtuais ↑ (4.529)

PGM Moderação (5)

**fórum**

tópico	postagens	última postagem
<a href="#">[[[-- SISTEMA DE BUSCA DE TÓPICOS DA PGM --]]]</a>	16	15/08/11
<a href="#">+ Joelson Sousa + esquartejado em quarto de motel</a>	1.861	15/08/11
<a href="#">↑Joacir José Bresolin ↑ Suicídio</a>	24	15/08/11
<a href="#">OFF - Mulher mata o marido a facadas</a>	4	15/08/11
<a href="#">João Guilherme (11 anos) atingido por trave de gol</a>	10	15/08/11

[ver todos os tópicos >](#)

[acesse orkut.com](#) | [sobre o orkut](#) | [blog](#) | [desenvolvedores](#) | [central de segurança](#) | [privacidade](#) | [termos de uso](#) | [publicidade](#) | [ajuda](#)

tecnologia do

Figure 8- PGM's main page (15.08.2011)

The original community was active on Orkut from December 2004 to May 2012, when it was deleted (Martins, 2013). Reasons for the community's deletion and the creation of a new one right after are unknown. However, during the eight years of the original community, it became very popular, being classified, especially by the Brazilian press, as "bizarre", "morbid", "useless" and "curious" (Martins, *idem*).

The community became a hot topic for newspaper and magazine articles, mentioned on popular TV programs, websites and blogs and even by families who had the profiles of their deceased loved ones posted there (Martins, *ibidem*). By January 2012, the community had more than 80,000 participants, one owner and three moderators, with an average of 250 membership requests per month (Martins, 2013).

### 3.1 Rules

As PGM grew bigger and more popular, those interested in joining were incentivised to read its rules carefully before sending a membership request. These rules were posted on a separate community's page, called PGM *Moderação* (Figure 9). 'PGM Moderation' was created in 2008, therefore the 'Dead People Profiles' had already existed for four years when it became active.

Its description was:

This is a community created so that members can see what happens while moderating PGM.  
Reasons for ALL expulsions from the community will be justified here.  
May that serve as an example so members have a good conduct within PGM and avoid problems with the moderation.  
We use this space to make PGM's rules available to the public prior to the acceptance of participation in the community.  
This community is closed (destined to moderators only), so do not ask to join, for the request will be denied.  
Thank you!  
=====

Have you read PGM's rules?  
Go to: (link to the topic with the rules)

'PGM Moderation' only had six members: PGM's owner<sup>66</sup> and four moderators. The community was closed but its contents could be visualised by

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<sup>66</sup> He had two profiles, therefore added to the community as if they were from two different people.

non-members, making it a read-only community. All requests to join 'PGM Moderation' were declined and it was not possible to add topics or make comments on any of the posts which justified the expulsion of certain members from PGM itself. Whoever visited that community was only a spectator.

The main objective for the creation of 'PGM Moderation' was to display PGM's rules to prospective members before submitting a membership request, and to show PGM members how PGM's owner and moderators worked. As PGM was very popular, arguments and misunderstandings were common. Therefore, clarification of the reasons for the expulsion of those who did not respect the rules was needed.

Circumstances involving the expulsion of a PGM member were detailed in 'PGM Moderation' not only to clarify disputes, but also to "serve as an example so members have a good conduct within PGM and avoid problems with the moderation", as stated in the aforementioned description. This is a clear demonstration of the moderation team's desire to maintain PGM's proper functioning. The following screenshot (Figure 10) shows how PGM's rules were laid out at 'PGM Moderation'.

PGM's rules are translated as follows:

[[[PGM's Rules]]]

Please read our rules carefully. They are radically met in PGM and it is important that they are known by all so that there are no problems later. They are as follows:

Fake Death - Forbidden and the author is expelled. If someone helps with the hoax, he/she will be expelled as well.

Out of Subject Topics (IT – which stands for Irrelevant Topic) - Allowed. Nevertheless, they may be deleted. Chances are high. About 95% of such topics are deleted, otherwise the community will be full of varied subjects, leaving the profiles in the background. Think carefully and use common sense before you post a topic with no profile. However, be aware that it might be deleted. If 95% of them are deleted, there are good chances of yours being deleted as well. The moderation team is the one who decides to delete the topic or not. There is no way to write a rule for EVERY type of topic and there is no way to open a poll before deleting EVERY topic. Therefore, it is up to moderation to decide whether the topic is deleted or not.

Topics with posthumous tributes and communities paying homage to the deceased - Please do not post. Will be deleted.



Offences - Forbidden. Insults are not tolerated towards other members, the deceased, their relatives and the moderation team. Not even over the Chat Topic. If you are offended, do not answer, otherwise you will be penalised as well. Just inform the moderation team by providing the link to the discussion and if possible an image (screenshot) of the offence. Wait until measures are taken. It is the moderation's duty to decide whether the reported case is or IS NOT an offence. Respect the moderation's attitude and be patient. PGM is not a space for fights and if you do not feel comfortable with this type of rule, feel free to withdraw yourself from the community.

Chat - Allowed only on the Chat Topic. Within topics containing profiles, stay on subject. If posts begin to change subject, go to the Chat Topic to avoid problems.

Lack of Respect - Prohibited and can cause expulsion. On PGM, it is not allowed to disrespect the deceased's family and the deceased, which gives full access to the moderation for deleting the post and maybe the member.

Discussions on Religion and Politics - Allowed with mildness. Avoid radicalism and be respectful while expressing your opinion. Fanatics who often arrange confusion due to this kind of problem will be banned.

Advertising - Prohibited and can cause expulsion. It is forbidden to advertise other communities, products, companies, etc.

Issuing Value Judgements Regarding the Deceased - Allowed with mildness. Careful not to disrespect while judging, thus breaking the rule about Lack of Respect. It is the moderation's role to tell if one has crossed the line or not.

"Trouble-makers" - Members that often cause trouble for some reason are not interesting to PGM and may be expelled.

Members with Fake Profiles - Permitted, provided it is not pornographic or anything that offends someone directly, like fake profiles using paedophilic or racist images or designed to offend someone.

Complaints, Comments and Suggestions - Must be submitted to the staff (moderators) via scrap, NEVER open a topic for this.

Repeated Topic - Please communicate with a moderator via scrap. Do not chat on the topic, because despite being repeated, the name of a deceased person is still attached to it.

Standardisation - When posting a topic, pay attention to the standardisation. It must be like the following example: "†José da Silva† Accident; †Maria das Graças† Suicide; †João Pereira† Pneumonia". To make the sign of the cross, hold the ALT key pressing 0 1 3 4 together. If you cannot do it, you can use the "plus" sign (+).







[[[[ Comments]]]]

\* To begin with, this community has heavy content, where we talk about death, murder, suicide, illness, etc. If you do not feel well or do not agree with the discussion of these types of issues, it is advisable that you do not enter the community. We respect you as well as you should respect us.

\* The community is public, so the owner is not responsible for its content.

\* People with bad intentions can also enter the community. Unfortunately, there is no way to filter incoming members, since I cannot pre-judge a person based on his/her profile.

\* The information provided on the profiles are public content, so we are free to read, download and argue over what is seen (Orkut itself warns us about this during registration).

\* Requests from family members or people who are very close to the deceased will be answered.

\* PGM is not governed by a "Statute of Good Conduct" full of laws and rules. Unfortunately, it is impossible to predict all kinds of problems that this type of community may have, so common sense comes before everything. The moderation team does not follow rules for conflicts only, so do not use conflicts themselves as a reason to do something that we (and other members) judge wrongly.

\* Before you ask for something or complain about something you did, think that if I make an exception for you, I will have to open up to others.

\* PGM cherishes the quality of its topics and that's why many are deleted. This is the community's formula and it has worked so far. It will not change. Democracy is present in PGM. Remember that even in a democracy we have laws and, above all, ethics. However, I know that many people do not know how to differentiate anarchy from democracy. Freedom from debauchery. Therefore, if you find that there is a dictatorship in PGM, OK. However, do not use that as a defence.

The rigidity of moderation can bring injustice, but unfortunately, it is impossible to be 100% fair because there would have to be moderation on top of EVERYTHING that happens in the community. That is impossible, however great the number of moderators. So, have patience.

If someone disagrees with some of the rules and/or do not intend to fulfil them, please leave before causing problems for good members.

Thank you for your cooperation!

The moderation team started laying out PGM's rules by asking those interested in joining the community to read them very carefully, since they were "radically met", a measure which aimed to avoid problems and expulsions. The first point related to posting a fake death, i.e. posting the profile of someone who was still alive, saying that they were dead. This attitude was seen as disrespectful and not only the author of the post, but also those who contributed to sustain the lie, could be expelled from the group. This kind of post was seen as a playful one and, according to the rules, PGM was not a place for fun: death was taken as a serious matter and deserved respect.

The following screenshot (Figure 11), shows the justification of expulsion of a PGM member who broke this rule; the expulsion occurred in August 2009. Since PGM was a closed community with its contents only available to members, as indicated in the translation of its rules earlier in this section, all non-members could see was the community's description. By placing the rules on an external community page like 'PGM Moderation', the moderators were able to explain how PGM worked without compromising its functioning and to support contestations of expelled members who claimed they joined PGM without being aware of its rules.

The rules continue by approaching the creation of Irrelevant Topics, generally referred by PGM's members as TIs (an abbreviation for *Tópico Inútil*, 'Inutile Topic' in direct translation from the Portuguese). They were allowed to a certain extent and could address subjects related to death and dying. However, that was not always the case and they could be deleted at any time. This type of topic could also be composed of jokes, pranks and even accusations against PGM and its members, and were mostly created by curious people who entered the community without being fully acquainted with its rules, goals or purpose. The Irrelevant Topic was one of three types of topics found in PGM, apart from the cataloguing of profiles. The other two were the OFF Topics and the Chat Topic.

Unlike TIs, OFF topics always addressed issues directly linked to death and dying and were not mentioned in PGM's rules. But they were primarily classified as a TI, and its permanence at PGM depended exclusively on the acceptance and participation of members. Between 2009 and 2011 PGM had four very popular OFF Topics which were not deleted by the moderation team exactly because they became spaces for members to share their own experiences with

death, dying and the supernatural (Martins, 2013). However, the most popular OFF topic was the "Virtual Wakes"<sup>67</sup>, which first provided links for accessing cameras from funerary companies which offered openly broadcast virtual wakes. Later, a reformulated topic and an independent community were created solely for the visualisation of the Virtual Wakes, and they will be addressed in Chapter 6.

The following issue addressed by PGM's rules was the creation of topics with posthumous homages and the advertisement of communities dedicated to the dead. Both practises were prohibited, and the post deleted by the moderation team. This prohibition was related to PGM being a space destined to the analysis of profiles and for discussions related to death and dying, not as a space of remembrance. The creation of communities dedicated to a dead person was very common on Orkut<sup>68</sup>.

Those communities were generally created by family or friends of the deceased as a space of conversion for sharing stories, pictures, videos and any kind of information particularly related to the deceased and which could strengthen their remembrance.

Another subject that was out of bounds for PGM members, liable to expulsion or banning, was the posting of pictures and videos of dead bodies, like footage of accidents, for example. The moderation team considered those as "heavy content" and "bizarre" and stated that PGM members were not there to see that kind of material.

Still according to the rules, it was also not allowed to offend anyone, dead or alive, even in the topics were destined for chatting. The moderation team asked members that, in case they felt offended, they should not reply with more offences because they could also be penalised. The offence needed to be reported, providing a link to the topic where the discussion was happening and, if possible, a screenshot. The consequences, including exclusion from the community, would be decided by the moderation team, the sole responsible for determining if it was in fact an offence or not.

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<sup>67</sup> Topic created in January 2009 as a follow up of two older, previously deleted ones. By 16.01.2012 it had 11.422 comments.

<sup>68</sup> In a similar fashion to the Memorial Profile on Facebook nowadays.

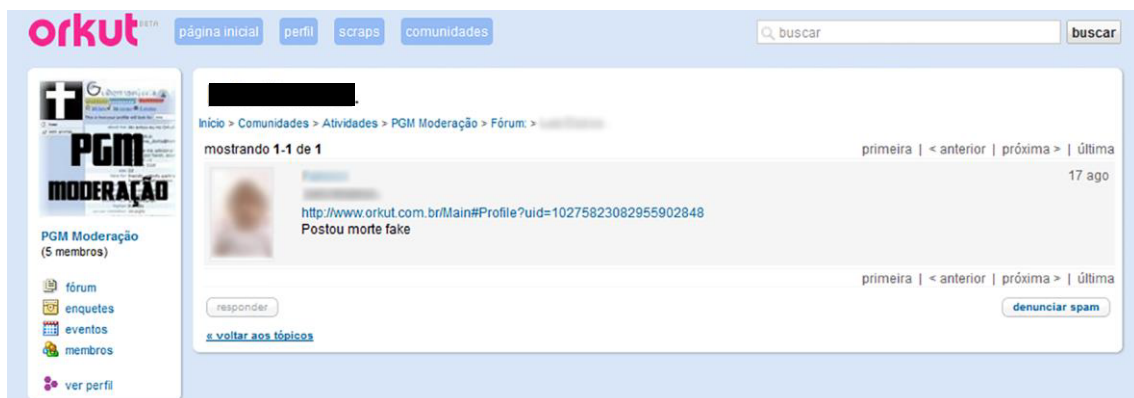


Figure 11 - An example of postage inside 'PGM Moderation', justifying the exclusion of a PGM member (17.08.2009)

Conversation with a more personal content, like the exchange of information unrelated to the cataloguing of profiles or matters of death and dying, should only be carried out in the Chat Topic. The rules stated that PGM members should not start such conversations on topics where a profile was posted because that was thought to be disrespectful. Lack of respect was the following topic approached by moderation. It was penalised with the exclusion from the community and it did not matter if the fault was committed towards the deceased, their family, friends or PGM members.

Religious and political discussions were permitted with reasonableness and the moderation team advised members to avoid radicalisms and to seek to express their opinion in a respectful manner. Arguments rooted in religious or political discussions could also lead to expulsion. Advertising was also forbidden under the penalty of expulsion. Value judgements were allowed as long as members were attentive to not be disrespectful. Moderation was also responsible for deciding whether the disrespect took place or not.

Members who joined PGM with the intent to cause problems were also expelled. Those who chose entering PGM using a fake profile were welcome, as long as they were not offensive. Complaints, critics and suggestions were advised to be made directly available to the moderation team, through the posting of a message – or scrap, on their profiles' scrapbook – instead of creating a topic on PGM to do so. Moderation also encouraged members to do a little research before posting a profile on the group, in order to guarantee it was not a repeated one. Moderators needed to be informed about a repeated topic, and members should not start discussing it on the topic itself because, as the rules state, they would be doing so in the “presence” of the profile of a deceased person, and that profile needed to be respected.

Standardisation was the last rule. Any profile posted on PGM needed to follow the guidelines referring to placing the name of the deceased between crosses or the plus sign, followed by the cause of death, if known, i.e. “†Jane Doe† Suicide”. This measure ensured that members were aware of the cause of death of a person whose profile was posted on the community before they visited the respective topic to make comments, or before visiting the deceased's profile. In a previous study, members have stated that causes of death like suicide, murder or the death of a young person were exactly the defining factor in making

them want to read a topic posted on PGM and/or visit the deceased's profile (Martins, 2013).

After outlining the community's rules, the post on PGM Moderation conveyed observations related to how PGM worked, bringing to the attention of prospective new members the delicate nature of the community, reinforcing characteristics such as the public nature of the information available on Orkut and how PGM's owner should not be held legally responsible for the content posted on PGM, amongst other issues generally outlined in the rules.

### **3.2 Inside the *Profiles de Gente Morta* Community**

After reading the rules and having the membership request approved, the new PGM member was finally able to see the community's topics, take part in the discussions, contribute by posting links to profiles of deceased Orkut users or start watching virtual wakes. The group had specific terms which the new member also needed to learn in order to fully understand what others were referring to. The language was based on acronyms for common expressions used over the years, but they did not compromise the interaction between old and new members. PGM's basic vocabulary consisted of five acronyms and two English words:

RIP: Rest in Peace, used in English;

DEP: *Descanse em Paz*, 'Rest in Peace' in Portuguese;

OFF: Used to label a topic on matters related to death and dying, like complaints, missing person notices and others, but did not contain links to profiles of deceased Orkut users;

JFP: *Já foi Postado*, which in literal translation means 'It was already posted', used to flag repeated topics;

NSC: *Não sei a Causa*, meaning 'I don't know the cause', used when the author of the post did not know the *causa mortis* of the person whose profile was posted in the community. The NSC acronym was used to ensure the standardisation rule was met even when there was not enough information about the deceased;

TI: *Tópico Inútil*, or Irrelevant Topic, which was generally composed of matters unrelated to the death of a person or death and dying as a whole;

UP: The English word was used to make an older topic appear on the community's main page and attract the attention of other members to it. Whoever was interested in continuing a conversation or in acquiring more information on that specific topic would simply post 'UP' as a reply to a thread and this would guarantee the appearance of said topic on PGM's main page, where there was a box containing the latest updated topics. There was no Portuguese word in use on PGM for this, but with time it was transformed into an informal verb, *upar*<sup>69</sup>.

An average of 77 topics were created or updated daily and 250 members joined PGM monthly, adding up to more than 80,000 participants, the highest number PGM ever had on Orkut (Martins, 2013)<sup>70</sup>. There were no pre-requisites to become a member and fundamentally every new request was accepted (Martins, *idem*).

Figure 12 shows how a post was constructed in PGM, with the name of the deceased placed between crosses, followed by the cause of death: it shows not only the placement of the link to the profile of a deceased Orkut user, but also the links to the profile of the deceased's husband (who also died in the accident, according to the second comment), and to a journalistic report giving information about the accident that killed them. Following those comments, it is possible to see the acronym 'DEP' being used by PGM members.

### 3.3 An Overview on PGM's Members

In 2007, Google introduced a new feature to Orkut: the possibility of creating polls. After answering a poll, it was possible to add comments, generally to justify a particular answer or make observations on the poll itself. As a very active community, PGM members had a very hands-on approach in making sure the rules were followed. Topics purporting to collect personal information were immediately classified as Irrelevant or OFF Topics, according to the aforementioned rules. With the possibility to create polls which would not clash with the community's main forum or postage flux, the new feature was vastly

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<sup>69</sup> The -AR suffix being found in the Portuguese language to characterise verbs.

<sup>70</sup> On the 16th of January 2012 PGM had 81.062 members. Later in August, it was closed for no apparent reason. A little later it was re-created, but up until Orkut's closure in 2014, PGM never recovered.

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**PGM - Profiles de Gente Morta**  
(57.428 membros)

- fórum
- enquetes
- eventos
- membros
- ver perfil

### † Gente Morta †Acidente

Início > Comunidades > Outros > PGM - Profiles de Gente Morta > Fórum: > Mensagens

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	<p>† Gente Morta †Acidente</p> <p>Profile: <a href="http://www.orkut.com.br/Main#Profile.aspx?uid=16367550355228497403">http://www.orkut.com.br/Main#Profile.aspx?uid=16367550355228497403</a></p> <p>Noticia: <a href="http://www.sulnoticias.com/index.php/page/policia/ed/4/cdn/9892">http://www.sulnoticias.com/index.php/page/policia/ed/4/cdn/9892</a></p>	07:37 (12 horas atrás)
	<p>Marido: <a href="http://www.orkut.com.br/Main#Profile.aspx?uid=7392250999076013800">http://www.orkut.com.br/Main#Profile.aspx?uid=7392250999076013800</a></p> <p>De acordo com outro jornal tb faleceu no local</p>	07:51 (12 horas atrás)
	<p>Noticia: <a href="http://www.difusora910.com.br/jornalismo_detalhes.php?codigo_not=31276&amp;tipo=n">http://www.difusora910.com.br/jornalismo_detalhes.php?codigo_not=31276&amp;tipo=n</a></p>	07:51 (12 horas atrás)
	<p>D E P</p>	07:59 (12 horas atrás)
	<p>DEP</p>	08:27 (12 horas atrás)
	<p>D.E.P</p>	13:46 (6 horas atrás)
	<p>dep</p>	16:05 (4 horas atrás)
	<p>DEP</p>	18:32 (1½ horas atrás)

Figure 12 - Example of a PGM post featuring the link to the profile of a deceased Orkut user (10.11.2008)



used by PGM members<sup>71</sup> and by April 2009, there were at least 18 active polls in the community<sup>72</sup>.

Consequently, data related to PGM's members on Orkut up to 2013, present in this chapter, were mainly collected from these polls, gathered in the form of screenshots during years of research on the group. The screenshots gathered are from polls with the most relevant themes in relation to those previous studies (Martins, 2009, 2013).

The following overview of PGM's members was constructed with data retrieved from ten polls, posted in the community by its own members.

Seven of these polls were organised chronologically with the aid of one screenshot (Figure 13), which is from PGM's list of active polls in 2009. Screenshots of the other three polls were gathered in 2011 but their actual date of creation is unavailable; however, it is safe to affirm that they were created between 2009 and 2011.

Since Orkut is no longer available for new data collection or consultation, the information presented here is related to polls on PGM members' religion, place of residency, fear towards the community's content, length of time of participation, the most common causes of death posted in the community, use of a fake profile, reasons to enter the community, how members would like to have their bodies disposed of after death and if they visited or left any kind of message on the profiles of deceased Orkut users. For analytical purposes, they were separated into three categories:

- 1) Personal Information: religion, place of residency, usage of fake profiles, reasons to enter the community and how they would like their bodies to be disposed of after death;
- 2) On and offline Behaviour: visiting and leaving messages on the profiles featured on the group and fear towards the community's content;
- 3) Community Information: most common causes of death posted in the community and length of time of participation.

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<sup>71</sup> Since the feature was added before I entered the community, many themes were already covered, and the creation of repeated polls was discouraged by the time I started collecting data in previous research (Martins, 2009; 2013). In addition, as a relatively new member and researcher by the time I started collecting data, I chose to respect the rules and avoided creating topics which would be valuable to me but understood as 'Irrelevant' or 'OFF' topics by PGM's Moderation team.

<sup>72</sup> According to a screenshot from 27.04.2009.

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pesquisa do orkut

Q

PGM - Profiles de Gente Morta

(62.290 membros)

fórum

enquetes

eventos

membros

ver perfil

PGM - Profiles de Gente Morta

(62.290 membros)

fórum

enquetes

eventos

membros

ver perfil

Pesquisas

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primeira

< anterior

próxima >

última

	pergunta	autor	votos	abrir data	fechar data
<input type="checkbox"/>	votar Mortes noticiadas pela TV são mais discutidas que outras na PGM?	Andréia	37	26 abr (12 horas atrás)	1 jun (em 4 semanas)
<input type="checkbox"/>	votar membros expulsos devem ser reconsiderados???	Quem?	85	29/11/08	
<input type="checkbox"/>	votar DE QUE LUGAR VOCÊ TC ?	sarah	65	27/10/08	
<input type="checkbox"/>	votar Quem foi o responsável pela morte da Eloá?	Ze	126	20/10/08	
<input type="checkbox"/>	votar Por favor, seja sincero. Seu profile é fake?	Luilton	119	28/09/08	
<input type="checkbox"/>	votar Quem vc acha que matou isabella ?	Pérolas	196	16/04/08	
<input type="checkbox"/>	votar Quem merece a maior punição?	Gilberto	107	24/02/08	
<input type="checkbox"/>	votar Você acha que a comunidade deve ter seu conteúdo fechado somente para membros?	Guilherme	448	05/02/08	
<input type="checkbox"/>	votar Quanto tempo faz que você frequenta a PGM?	✪ Katy ✪	403	26/11/07	
<input type="checkbox"/>	votar Você comemora a morte de bandidos que aparecem na PGM?	Depressivo	591	23/10/07	
<input type="checkbox"/>	votar Ler ou ver imagens de acidentes te deixam com medo de algo parecido acontecer com vc?	Sem Registro	994	03/10/07	
<input type="checkbox"/>	votar VC ACHA QUE A PESSOA QUE SE SUICIDA DEVE TER O PERDAO DE DEUS?	Denise	821	21/09/07	

Figure 13 - List of Pools available on PGM (26.04.2009)

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To complement these polls, information retrieved from an OFF Topic, titled “Interview with Members”, will be analysed with them. This topic was created in February 2009, by a PGM member using a fake profile<sup>73</sup>. As aforementioned, according to the community’s rules, such topics could be deleted by the moderation team unless it sparked members’ interest. However, this topic, which was constructed like a questionnaire, was widely accepted by PGM members, who contributed to it by responding to its nine questions (Figure 14):

- 1) What led you to PGM?
- 2) Would you like your profile to be posted here after you die?
- 3) Do you think this obsession with “the life of the dead”<sup>74</sup> is normal?
- 4) In a community about cooking nobody uses a fake profile. Why are most of PGM members’ profile fakes? Are they trying to protect themselves from possible reprisals (by other members or relatives of the deceased, for example)?
- 5) What kind of death draws more attention?
- 6) What is your opinion regarding the increasing (and terrifying) number of suicides reported in this community’s topics?
- 7) Would you change something in this community?<sup>75</sup>
- 8) Would you post the death of a close relative in this community (e.g. father, mother, children...)?
- 9) What is your opinion about the eventual posting of “DEP” and “RIP” messages on the deceased’s profiles? Would you find it offensive if the deceased was someone close to you?

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<sup>73</sup>The profile was characterised as fake because it used the picture of a witch as an avatar, and the name ‘Bruja’, meaning ‘witch’ in Spanish. Later on, the name and picture of the profile was changed to ‘Freya’, a Germanic goddess.

<sup>74</sup> This “life of the dead” expression was interpreted as a reference to the profiles and how they portrayed the individuals before their deaths.

<sup>75</sup> This question was not included in the analysis.

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pesquisa do orkut

PGM - Profiles de Gente Morta

(61.590 membros)

fórum

enquetes

eventos

membros

ver perfil

OFF- Entrevista com os membros!

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22 fev (3 dias atrás)

OFF- Entrevista com os membros!

Olá, !

Resolvi criar esse tópico para conhecer melhor a relação dos membros da PGM com a comunidade. Sei que algumas pessoas aqui não conseguem passar um dia sequer longe desta comunidade, então elaborei uma entrevista. Basta responder as perguntas enumerando-as de acordo com a ordem das questões.

1-O que o levou a frequentar a PGM?

2-Vc gostaria que seu perfil fosse exposto aqui depois que vc morresse?

3-Vc acha que é normal esta obsessão pela vida dos mortos?

4-Em uma comunidade de receita culinária ninguém usa fake. Pq na PGM a maioria dos mebrs são fakes? Os membros fakes da comunidades estão tentando se proteger de possíveis represálias (por parte de outros membros ou parente de falecidos, por exemplo)?

5-Que tipo de morte chama mais a atenção quando acontece?

6- Qual a sua opinião em relação ao numero crescente (e apavorante) de suicídios nos tópicos desta comunidade?

7- Você mudaria algo aqui na pgm?

8- Você Postaria a morte de um parente próximo aqui na PGM (ex\* pai, mae filhos...)

9- Qual à sua opinião a respeito dos "DEP e RIP" eventualmente postados nos perfis dos falecidos? Isso lhe pareceria ofensivo, se o falecido fosse você ou alguém proximo?

\*espero que gostem! bjs\*

Figure 14 - "Interview with Members" post (22.02.2009)

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The postage flux on this particular topic was accompanied since its creation, and it became very popular<sup>76</sup>: Between February and March 2009, 141 members fully answered them. At the time, PGM had more than 60,000 members. Since the “Interview” questions are quite similar or complimentary to the polls, they are analysed together to avoid repetition.

The reason why data from this “Interview with Members” were included in this work is because they offer a deeper understanding of how PGM members behaved and understood the community and its activities. There are no data on members’ age or gender.

Whenever possible, both sets of data will be compared to numbers from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) and/or other official sources, in order to construct a more comprehensive sample or to contextualise it to the Brazilian background. Data pertaining the visualisation of virtual wakes will be analysed on Chapter 6, dedicated to the theme. In each section, the poll’s title and voting options were translated, along with comments in the comments section, if visible in the screenshots. The original screenshot of each poll is provided.

### **3.3.1 Personal Information - Religion**

One of the first polls to be created on PGM was related to religion (Figure 15). The main religious groups in Brazil, according to an IBGE report from 2010, are Roman Catholics (64.6%), Protestants (22.2%), and Spiritists (2%). Other Religions (3.1%) puts together faiths with an African background like *Umbanda* and *Candomblé*. Those who declared to follow no religion included up to 8% of the population, which amounted, in total, to more than 190 million people<sup>77</sup> (IBGE 2010).

The poll regarding this subject on PGM provided similar options after asking “What is your Religion?”: ‘Catholic’ (1223 votes, 39%), ‘Evangelical’<sup>78</sup> (675 votes, 21%), ‘Spiritist’ (506 votes, 10%), ‘Other’ (402 votes, 16%) and ‘Atheist’ (314 votes, 12%). The proportion of votes for each option is in accordance with the official data presented above. There were 3.120 votes in total.

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<sup>76</sup> I have even contributed with my own answers, which were not included in the analysis.

<sup>77</sup> 190.732.694 people, according to IBGE.

<sup>78</sup> That is how Protestants are normally called in Brazil, encompassing different denominations.

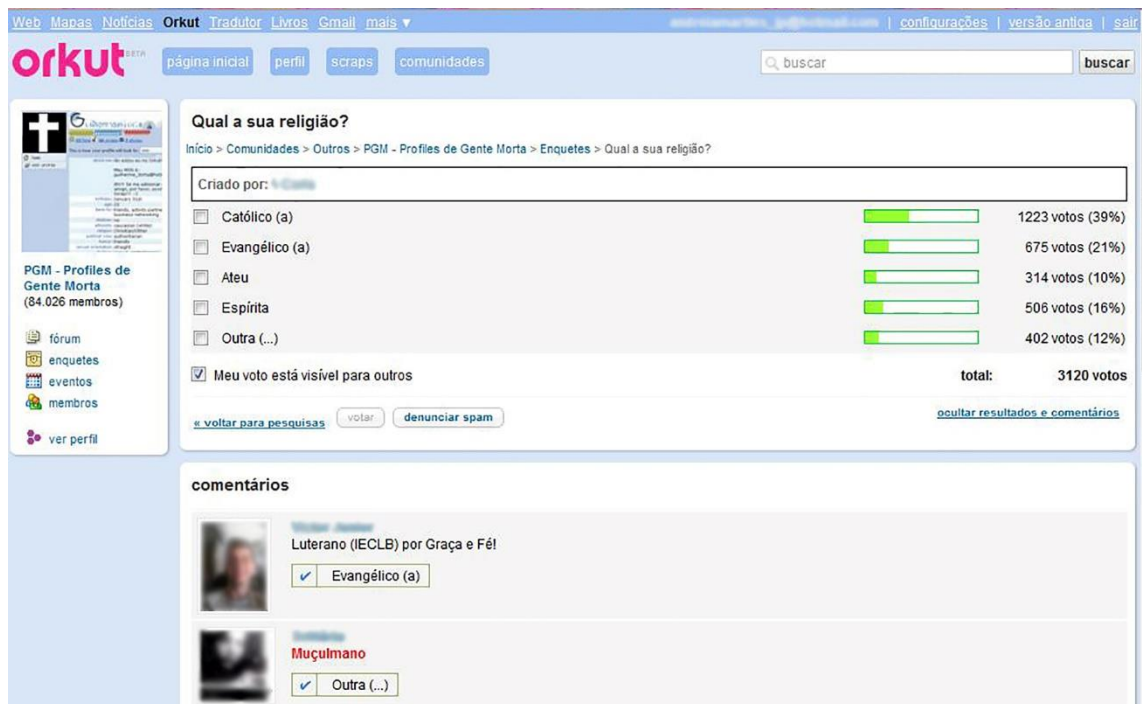


Figure 15 - Poll on religion (05.07.2007)

### 3.3.2 Personal Information – Members’ Place of Residency<sup>79</sup>

Brazil’s 1988 Constitution defines the country as a Federative Presidential Republic, formed by 26 states and the Federal District. States are grouped in five political and administrative regions: North, Northeast, Midwest, Southeast and South. The Northern Region has the largest area, encompassing 45.2% of the country. Despite its size, it has the lowest population density, with over 16 million residents.

The Northeast Region has the second largest territory, covering 18.2% of the country. It has the third highest GDP and a population of over 50 million. The Midwest holds 18.86% of the Brazilian territory, with a population of about 12 million, and it is where the Federal District is located, having the fourth highest GDP. The Southeast occupies 10.9% of the country and has the highest GDP. Since it comprises the two most populous cities in Brazil (São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro), it has a population of about 80 million. The Southern Region is the one with the smallest area, adding up to 6.8% of the country and a population of over 26 million inhabitants. It is the second richest region after the Southeast, and the one with the highest literacy rate and the best levels of education, health and social welfare of the country.

In a poll entitled “Which state are you from?”, created in August 2007, there were 3.016 answers in total. However, they point to a possible confusion between the state where members were born and the state they were living in when answering the poll. This can be because 3.91% (118 votes) declared to be residing outside of Brazil, according to the option which stated, ‘I live abroad’. Nonetheless, the distribution of PGM members throughout the country was as follows: Southeast Region (1.324 votes, 43.89%), South Region (632 votes, 20.95%), Northeast Region (460 votes, 15.25%), Midwest Region (315 votes, 10.44%) and North Region (167 votes, 5.53%), as demonstrated in Figure 16.

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<sup>79</sup> There’s no screenshot for this particular poll, only a Windows Word document in which the data from the poll was saved.

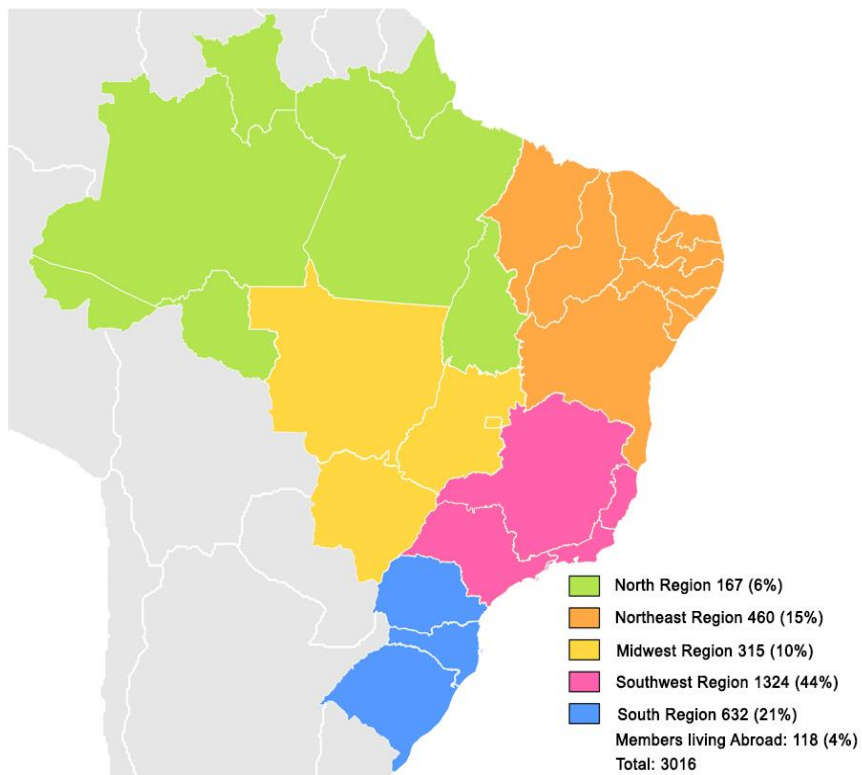


Figure 16 - Distribution of PGM members in Brazil, according to region



### 3.3.3 Personal Information – Fake Profile

The usage of Fake Profiles was common on Orkut (Duran, 2009). A fake profile would display information that was either invented or untrue, which could be understood as an attempt to mask the identity of the person behind it. The poll which tried to survey how common was the usage of fake profiles on PGM was titled “Please, be sincere. Is your profile fake?”. In September 2008 it had 237 votes<sup>80</sup> and the majority (178 votes, 75%) claimed to be using their real profiles for being a part of the community. Only 24% (59 votes) claimed to be using a fake one (Figure 17).

One of the questions from the “Interview with Members” post dealt with this subject as well. It asked: “In a community about cooking nobody uses a fake profile. Why are most of PGM members' profiles fakes? Are they trying to protect themselves from possible reprisals (by other members or relatives of the deceased, for example)?” If the numbers from the aforementioned poll are taken into consideration, it can be used to demonstrate that the affirmation presented in this “Interview” question was untrue or, at least, misguided.

Most members did not answer this question directly<sup>81</sup>. Many thought it was about stating if their profile was a real or fake one, while also giving their opinion on the use of fake profiles. The way in which the question itself was composed already gives some kind of answer by suggesting that the use of fake profiles was predominant in the community and that they were an attempt to guarantee self-preservation.

Since the majority of answers weren't straightforward, it was necessary to separate them into seven different categories. Four of those categories<sup>82</sup> will not be analysed because they relate to answers from members who claimed to use either a real or a fake profile but did not provide their opinions on the matter raised by the question (a total of 23 answers). On the other hand, three categories were further analysed because members answered the question by also giving their

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<sup>80</sup> 28.09.2008.

<sup>81</sup> In this particular question, only 136 answers qualified as valid.

<sup>82</sup> 1) Members who claimed their profile was real without giving further information – 8; 2) Members who claimed their profile was fake without giving further information – 4; 3) ‘Don’t know’ – 3 (one mentioned being virtually stalked by a man suspect of committing a murder) and 4) Undetermined answers – 13.

own opinions on the use of fake profiles, which, in turn, provided an interesting insight into the way they used to think. The three analysed categories are:

- 1) Members who claimed their profiles were real and provided interpretations for the use of fake profiles;
- 2) Members who claimed their profiles were fake and provided their reasons for it;
- 3) Members that provided their interpretations for the use of fake profiles without stating if they used a real or fake one.

### **1) Members Who Claimed Their Profile was Real and Provided Interpretations for the Use of Fake Profiles**

From the total of 36 answers placed in this category, 13 agreed with the question's suggestion. They believe that the use of a fake profile is directly related to self-preservation, which can be linked to an attempt to avoid reprisals, and also to the possibility of returning to the group in the case of being banned. If a member was banned, they could simply create a new profile with a different name in order to request membership again. The self-preservation aspect can also be linked to fear of criticism, not only by members of the deceased's family, if they discovered about PGM's existence, but by members of the community itself. On PGM, practically every membership request was accepted, so it was possible that family or friends of deceased Orkut users whose profiles were featured in the community could join it as well.

The second most popular answer in this group was from eight members who claimed they used a real profile, but their opinions for doing so were somewhat difficult to determine. In a couple of those cases, they claimed they were using their real profiles because they were not afraid of any development which could arise from their participation in the community.

Freedom of speech was also a reason, raised by four members who also claimed that the user of a fake profile wants to be socially accepted or express their deepest feelings without exposing themselves, which can also be understood as a type of self-preservation, just unrelated to fear.

As noted with the previous reason, there were also four members who saw the use of fake profiles as a personal matter, by answering that each individual has her/his own reasons or that they had no judgements or problems with those

who chose to do so. The same number was computed for those who answered they did not know if the use of fake profiles was related to self-preservation, as suggested by the question.

There were only three members who declared to be against the use of fake profiles by using harsher words to express their views. They claimed those users were “cowards”, “hiding” behind their profiles, and that the practice was “unnecessary”.

## **2) Members Who Claimed Their Profile was Fake and Provided Their Reasons for It**

There are 33 answers in this category, with four different types of justification. The most popular one, with 27 answers, is also related to self-preservation. Since all answers belong to members who do use fake profiles, their reasons for doing so were quite diverse, even if placed under the umbrella of self-preservation. Some had professional reasons or were moderators in other Orkut communities.<sup>83</sup> Others specifically did not want to be linked with PGM whatsoever, and there was even a claim of being ashamed of being a member, and another of not wanting to explain to others why they were a member, and the anonymity of a fake profile allowed that. There were also claims of feeling more comfortable with a fake profile: “it takes me where I cannot go”, one user wrote, or to use a fake profile only to make harsher comments and “getting away with it”, as stated by another. A member claimed their “semi-fake”<sup>84</sup> profile would help protect their children from accidentally accessing the community.

The other three types of justification offered on this category, with two answers each, were related to freedom of speech and members who claimed to ‘not know why’ they preferred using fake profiles. There were also two undetermined answers. These answers were either straightforward or did not offer further material for examination.

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<sup>83</sup> Some of those communities were extremely popular and, if administered well, owners could even earn money from them with ads or endorsements. So, it is understandable that, in this case, or for religious reasons, for instance, the use of a fake profile would be ideal.

<sup>84</sup> Using a photo of themselves in their profile picture but under a different name.

### **3) Members Who Provided Their Interpretations for the Use of Fake Profiles Without Stating if They Did or Did Not Use a Real One Themselves**

Forty-four members gave their interpretations on the use of fake profiles without stating if their profile was real or not. These answers were much closer to what was proposed in the question, and the majority of them – 32 – was, again, corroborating the suggestion that the use of fake profiles was related to self-preservation. Some of those answers indicated that the self-preservation issue was related to the fact that the community was controversial, and to the nature of the topics discussed in it. Fear was also very present, but this fear was related to being labelled. An answer from one of the members who gave this type of reasoning for fake profiles is very interesting because of the use of the expression “*papa-defunto*”, used to label those who are interested in death.

Translated literally, it means ‘defunct-eater’, an expression originally used to specify a type of armadillo that, according to north-eastern folklore, feeds from cadavers. Funeral directors are called *papa-defuntos* in a pejorative manner, to imply that they are greedy. Overall, the expression is employed to qualify a person as morbidly curious. Another pejorative word used in conjunction with the idea of avoidance of labels was “*urubu*”, which means vulture in Portuguese, also used to qualify a person that is overly interested in death. Both *papa-defunto* and *urubu* are also used to identify people who like to attend *velórios*, especially those of strangers.

Six answers in this category were from those who declared to be against the use of fake profiles. They categorised it as “pathetic”, a “weakness”, “lack of courage” in admitting their fascination towards death-related topics, and also indicated its use as a “façade” to hide behind. Other reasons, which were unclear, also counted as six answers; three were related to freedom of speech and two indicated that the use of fake profiles was a personal choice. There were five undetermined answers.

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**PGM - Profiles de Gente Morta**  
(84.026 membros)

[fórum](#)  
[enquetes](#)  
[eventos](#)  
[membros](#)  
[ver perfil](#)

**Por favor, seja sincero. Seu profile é fake?**  
Início > Comunidades > Outros > PGM - Profiles de Gente Morta > Enquetes > Por favor, seja sincero. Seu profile é fake?

Obrigado.  
Criado por:

<input type="radio"/> SIM	<div style="width: 24%;"></div>	59 votos (24%)
<input type="radio"/> NÃO	<div style="width: 75%;"></div>	178 votos (75%)

☒ Meu voto está visível para outros total: 237 votos

[« voltar para pesquisas](#) [votar](#) [denunciar spam](#) [ocultar resultados e comentários](#)

**comentários**

**Sim!**  
☒ SIM

Não é exatamente um fake, é uma homenagem a Daniella. Mas eu tenho o meu perfil.  
☒ SIM

NÃOOOO!!!!  
☒ NÃO

Figure 17 - Poll on fake profiles (28.09.2008)

### 3.3.4 Personal Information – Reasons for Entering PGM

The creator of this poll, entitled “Why did you enter this community?”<sup>85</sup>, offered six reasons as possible answers: 1) ‘I thought it was nice to see profiles of deceased people’, 2) ‘I like morbid things’, 3) ‘A friend died and their profile was posted here’, 4) ‘I was invited by a friend’, 5) ‘I do not know’ and 6) ‘None of the above’.

From 970 votes, the majority chose ‘I thought it was nice to see profiles of deceased people’ (358 votes, 36%), followed closely by ‘None of the above’ (188 votes, 19%), ‘I do not know’ (183 votes, 18%) and ‘I like morbid things’ (179 votes, 18%).

The last two options – ‘A friend died and their profile was posted here’ and ‘I was invited by a friend’ were at a tie, with 31 votes each (31%). The ‘None of the above’ option (188 votes, 19%), indicated the possibility that members found out about the community elsewhere, as it is suggested by a member who made a comment in the comments section.

They wrote, as seen in Figure 18: “I saw a [journalistic] report about the community on a website and I thought it was very interesting”. Hence, it is possible that the attention the community received by the Brazilian media, mentioned previously, was also responsible for increasing its number of participants.

A similar question was posed to PGM members in the “Interview with Members” topic: “What led you to PGM”? Answers revealed a mix of reasons to enter the community, but also reasons to remain a member. Of the reasons to enter, according to the analysis, ‘Curiosity’ or ‘Interest in Death-related issues’ were the most popular (91 answers, 64,53%), followed by ‘Chance’ (19 answers, 13,47%).

When referring to finding PGM by ‘Chance’, many answers were followed by claims that members were not specifically looking for PGM or something of the sort when they found it. They came across the community mostly after seeing it on a friend’s communities’ list or while searching for another community. This could also be classified as ‘Curiosity’, because they saw the community’s title and were puzzled by what it meant. However, the principle that they were not

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<sup>85</sup> The screenshot was taken on 19.08.2011.

specifically looking for PGM or death-related communities strengthens the claim for 'Chance'.

Others claimed that they found PGM after reading or watching 'Journalistic reports about the community' or after a 'Friend's suggestion', which were placed in the same category (11 answers, 7,80%), while others mentioned learning about it 'After the death of a close person' (4 answers, 2,83%). On the reasons to remain a member, two interviewees claimed the community "made them feel relieved" (2 answers, 1,41%), narrating a feeling of life reassurance, based on the idea that they are still alive while others are dead, or a sense of relief to see others who are suffering with the death of a loved one, while they are not.

Twelve members (8.51%) could not remember how they found out about PGM or why they chose to remain, followed by three who gave undetermined answers (2,12%).

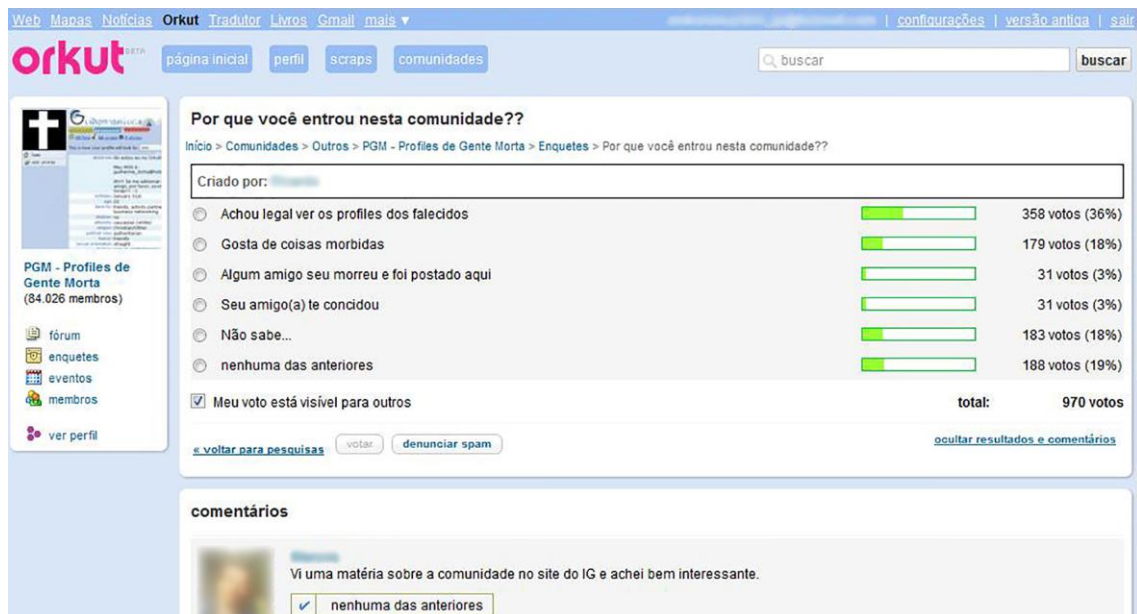


Figure 18 - Poll on reasons to join PGM (2009)



### 3.3.5 Personal Information – Disposal of the Body

The last poll in this category asked PGM members what they would like to be done with their bodies after death. The title of the poll was: “When you die, you will want to:”<sup>86</sup> and it offered four options: 1) ‘Be buried’, 2) ‘Be cremated’, 3) ‘Be cremated and buried’ and 4) ‘Other’, which was followed by a question mark and can be interpreted as an invitation for members to give details about it in the comments section. But, as shown in Figure 19, comments were not included in the screenshot.

In Brazil, as briefly mentioned in Chapter 1, burials are the most common way of disposal, according to a report from the Federal Senate in 2013, when 98.5% of the Brazilian population was buried, and only 1.5% was cremated. The first Brazilian crematorium was opened in the 1970’s in the city of São Paulo and remained the only one until the 1990’s. Currently, according to a list compiled by the Union of Private Cemeteries and Crematoria of Brazil, there are 53 privately owned crematoria in the country and they normally belong to a funerary company which also owns a cemetery.

Recent statistics on this are unavailable, but it is very likely that the numbers have not changed much in the last five years, because the preference for burial amongst Brazilians is deeply rooted in religion. There is a misconception that cremation is more expensive than burials in the country, which contributes to the preference of one over the other (Lewgoy, 2016). However, the cheaper aspect of cremations is only available to a portion of the Brazilian population, concentrated in large, urban areas.

Catholicism, which is the predominant faith in the country, condemned cremation until the early 1960s, when the Second Vatican Council declared that the faithful did not need to literally obey a prayer known as Creed<sup>87</sup>. Some contemporary Catholics now believe that the *soul* is to be raised to the heavens, not the body. Other important religions, as seen in the first poll, like Protestantism, Spiritism, Umbanda and Candomblé, are less deterministic about methods of disposal.

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<sup>86</sup> The screenshot was taken on 19.08.2011.

<sup>87</sup> The Apostle Creed is the complete name of the prayer. One of its verses states “I believe in the resurrection of the body.”



Figure 19 - Poll on preferred methods of disposal (2009)

For these faiths, either option is accepted (Folha, 2001); only in Spiritism, there needs to be a waiting period from two to three days after death, to allow the spirit to leave the body, before disposal can be initiated.

The poll, however, shows that, from 2.392 answers, the majority wanted to be cremated (1.054 votes, 44%), closely followed by those who wanted to be buried (922 votes, 38%). Being cremated and having the ashes buried was the third most voted option (144 votes, 6%) and other, unspecified methods, were the last on the list (272 votes, 11%). The unspecified option left room for members to make comments on the comment section. Those comments, though not shown in the screenshot, related to being cremated and having the ashes scattered, and also to the fact that they did not have any preference between either method of disposal.

As space is not an issue in Brazil, as it is in some European countries such as the UK and the Netherlands (Mathijssen, 2017), for example, burial remains the preferred method of disposal. This can also be linked to the number of crematoria still being small in the country, therefore not being able to cope with the demand, if it exists, or to people preferring to be 'put to rest' together with their loved ones. Perhaps being cremated could be seen as an act of separation, similar to the one experienced in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the sanitary reformations were introduced, prohibiting church burials and placing cemeteries away from the cities.

In the "Interview" post, members were not asked about what they wanted done with their bodies, but if they would like to have their profiles posted on PGM after death: "Would you like to have your profile posted here after you die?" The majority answered 'Yes' (95 answers, 67,37%). Answers like "sure, why not?", were quite common, followed by statements like "I'll leave my scrapbook open<sup>88</sup>", or "I'll give my password to someone, so they can unlock my profile<sup>89</sup>", and even mentioning that they would let friends and family know that this was their wish.

The ones who answered 'No' represented 18,43% (26 answers) and were quite blunt in their reasoning. Some simply stated, "no way!", or were concerned

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<sup>88</sup> At this point, in 2009, some Orkut profile features had undergone privacy updates. There was an option to make one's scrapbook only visible to friends.

<sup>89</sup> 'Unlocking' means leaving the profile accessible to all Orkut users, not just those with whom the profile owner was friends with.

with how some members were quick, inaccurate and even mean when expressing their value judgements towards profiles posted on PGM. Those who 'didn't know' or 'didn't care' about their profile being posted on the community after their deaths totalled 14,18% (20 answers), followed by one undetermined answer (0,70%).

The number of PGM members who died and had their profiles posted in the community is uncertain. There are at least three who remain in the communal memory of the group<sup>90</sup>. The most remembered one is a fake profile who went by the name of *Soninha Matos*. Soninha was a very active member<sup>91</sup>, and when she died, five months after the interview topic was created, PGM entered a mourning period, as shown in Figure 20.

This behaviour, portrayed by PGM following the death of an active member, could be seen as a link between the community and the brotherhoods which were addressed in the previous chapter. In this case, PGM acted as an online brotherhood, where people converged because of a common interest in death.

Brotherhoods were about faith and religion, but also about death, in a practical sense. PGM, at the hour of death of one of its members, came together to express its sympathy and acknowledge the deceased in a way that can be considered similar to what a brotherhood would do: not through organising a funeral or by offering prayers (which perhaps some did, individually), but by entering a mourning period, as stated in the community description, symbolised by a black stripe across its avatar picture (Figure 20).

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<sup>90</sup> Nowadays, whenever a post comes up on Facebook, asking if there are PGM members who died, the same names are remembered, the majority from the time PGM was active on Orkut.

<sup>91</sup> It is interesting that *Soninha* commented on the "interview with members" topic on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of February 2009 saying she would answer later. But a month later, when I stopped monitoring the topic, she still had not answered. She died in August 2009.

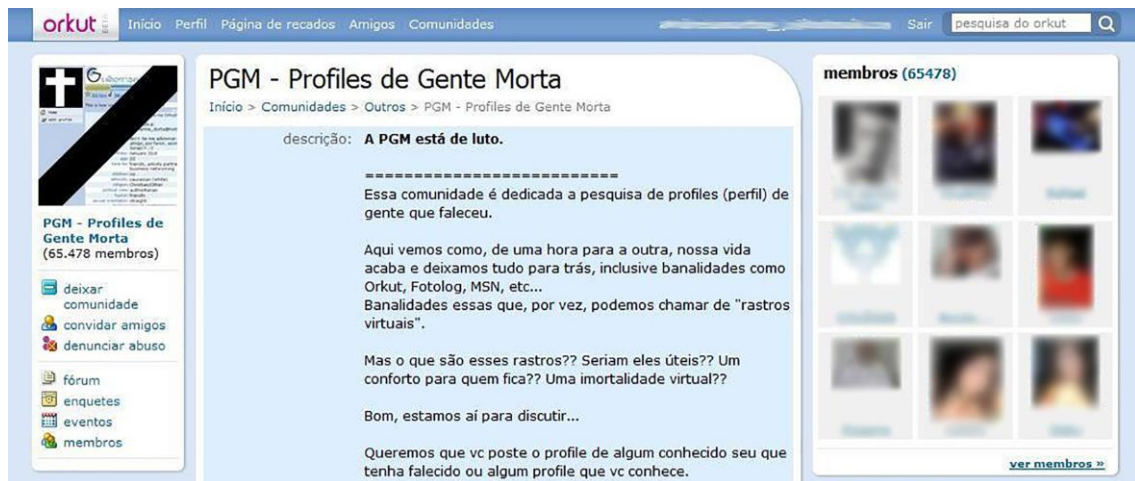


Figure 20 - PGM in mourning after the death of an active member (2009)

### 3.4 On and Offline Behaviour – Reactions to the Community’s Contents

The first poll in this category is “Does reading [about] or seeing images of accidents make you afraid of something similar happening to you?”. Created in October 2007<sup>92</sup>, by 2009 it had 1.054 votes and four possible answers: 1) ‘[It] Makes me think more [about life and death]’, 2) ‘Yes’, 3) ‘No’ and 4) ‘I think it is normal’.

Three members posted comments after taking part on the poll. They were: “It makes me think about the family of the deceased”; “Now I feel it is a bit normal, but when I entered PGM I was ‘dead’ scared of dying in a car crash. And that was good because it made me more cautious” and “I have faith in God that nothing bad will ever happen to me” (Figure 21).

The poll and subsequent comments provide a glimpse of how PGM members internalised and interpreted the deaths featured in the community. The first option, ‘[It] Makes me think more [about life and death]’ was the most voted one (464 votes, 44%). This may not only indicate that the community was serving as a trigger for reflection about life and death, but also for raising awareness about dangerous behaviours, such as drinking and driving.

There were also those who simply answered ‘Yes’ (280 votes, 24%) or ‘No’ (239 votes, 22%) to being afraid of dying as a consequence of an accident. Though the question referred to fear or being afraid of being a victim of an accident, the minority (98 votes, 8%) claimed this fear was normal, in the sense that most people are likely to be afraid of dying.

Perhaps, the fear mentioned in the question is also linked to the existence of aforementioned sites like Cabuloso, where they intend to educate about the risks of careless driving by sharing images of victims of car crashes. However, this kind of imagery was forbidden on PGM, but from time to time there were requests for them, or even some were posted on the community but later deleted by the moderation team<sup>93</sup>. There was no “Interview” question that dealt with this subject.

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<sup>92</sup> 03.10.2007.

<sup>93</sup> I remember one time I came across images like that on PGM, and I was quite shocked. I am one of those who do not enjoy looking at this kind of imagery and finding them on PGM really caught me by surprise. I was quite distressed for a couple of months.

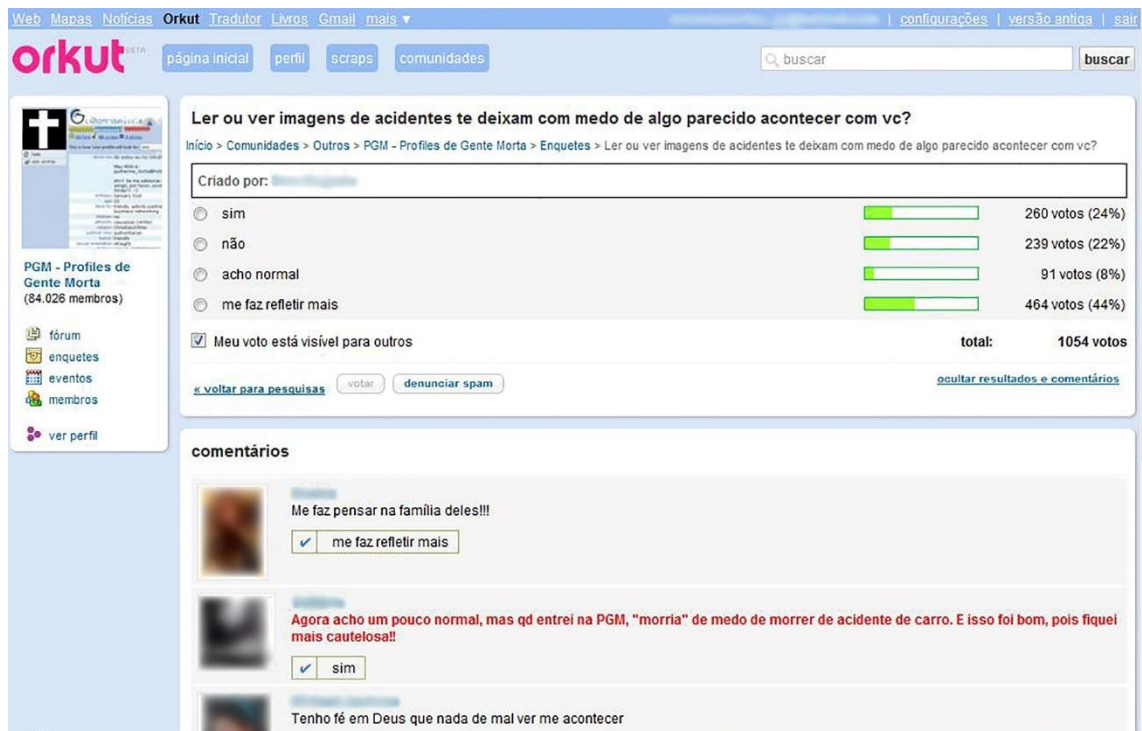


Figure 21 - Poll on members' reactions to the community's content (03.10.2007)

### 3.4.1 On and Offline Behaviour – Visiting Profiles

This poll was about PGM members visiting the profiles posted in the community; its title was “Do you visit the profiles posted [here]?”, and it had 397 votes in total<sup>94</sup> (Figure 22). There were five possible answers: 1) ‘I am morbid and I visit a profile as soon as I see it’, 2) ‘Sometimes, when I get curious’, 3) ‘Yes, and I leave condolences’, 4) ‘No, I like to make comments on the topic here [on PGM]’ and 5) ‘Only if it was a violent death’. Unfortunately, the creator of this poll indicated that there was a morbid aspect to the action of visiting the profiles posted on the community, which might have influenced the answers.

The very way in which the possible answers for this poll were constructed shed a light on the reasons why members visited the profiles, and curiosity can be seen as a common thread linking almost all of them. As the postage of gore images online, the behaviour of visiting profiles of deceased Orkut users can be linked to issues raised by Sontag (2003) when writing about images of war and suffering: such depictions are a “means of making ‘real’ (or ‘more real’) matters that the privileged and the merely safe might prefer to ignore” (Sontag, 2003, p.9).

That becomes quite clear in the first option, ‘I am morbid and I visit a profile as soon as I see it’ (151 votes, 38%), which was also the most voted one: the majority did classify their own behaviour towards visiting profiles of deceased Orkut users as morbid. It was also observed, in comments made on different PGM topics over the years, the use of the word morbid to classify the members’ interest in death and dying topics. Another hint that this visiting of profiles are means of making death real, as proposed by Sontag (2003), is the visiting profiles “as soon as I see it” affirmation, which also highlights the curiosity aspect of this behaviour.

The second most voted option, ‘Sometimes, when I get curious’ (116 votes, 29%), relates to curiosity even more, which indicates that some deaths are more interesting than others, especially uncommon or violent ones. In this case, perhaps, visiting the profile of someone who died in such conditions could offer clues as to what can be done to avoid a similar fate.

The third option, related to not only visiting profiles, but also to leaving condolence messages, received 62 votes (15%) and has a socio-religious

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<sup>94</sup> The screenshot was taken on 19.08.2011.



undertone to it. The visit can happen solely for the purpose of leaving condolence messages, but it is difficult to assume that one would not be curious at all, even if only to the extent of trying to understand what happened to the deceased. If this investigation does not happen, one could possibly assume that the condolence message has a 'one size fits all' formula and has less of a chance of being genuine. The religious undertone relates to the Catholic faith and the respect towards the dead which was quite present in 19<sup>th</sup> century Brazil but is still present in the country, and which will be further explored in the next topic.

'No, I like to make comments on the topic here [on PGM]', was the second least voted option (33 votes, 8%). It can be related to a more constricted curiosity, where the member wants to know what happened to the deceased but is perhaps ashamed of declaring such interest outside of the community. Therefore, the mode of obtaining information is through the comments of members who do visit the profiles – who, in turn, become their informants when they share their findings inside the community – and with whom they can debate about a particular death.

Finally, 'Only if it was a violent death' (35 votes, 8%), was the least voted option, and it further strengthens the link between curiosity and violent death and the notion that those types of death are more interesting than others, as mentioned earlier. This offers another insight into the aforementioned Brazilian behaviour of photographing and filming car accidents. But in this context, like in the first option, there might exist the additional possibility of trying to understand how that death came to be and how can one avoid dying in the same way.

Whichever was the reason for doing this, visiting the profiles offered more information about the deceased, who they were, what they did in life – in accordance to all the details provided when one created a profile on Orkut. Those details comprised the same information the social network site claimed useful to link people together and make new friends.

There are two examples of situations where visiting the deceased's profile could be understood as crucial to the way PGM functioned:

### **1<sup>st</sup> Example**

A man died in a car crash, and the accident was reported online, together with his name. A PGM member saw this report and searched for the deceased's name on Orkut, discovering that he had a profile on that social network site. The

PGM member then posts the link to the deceased's profile within the community, together with the link to the report on his death. The report states that alcoholic drinks were found in the vehicle and that the victim was returning home from a party.

Immediately, PGM members who like to visit the profiles featured in the community will do so and will give an account of their findings back to PGM, inside the topic where the link to the deceased's profile was made available to them. In this particular example, the victim's Orkut profile is filled with pictures of himself holding alcoholic drinks and of his car's speedometer at high speed.

Thus, PGM members would probably discuss about this inside the community, and the "passing of judgement", cited by the moderation team in the community's rules, would be very apparent. In this scenario, the victim could be judged as careless, some immediately assuming he was indeed drinking and driving, and that his dangerous behaviour was clearly apparent from the pictures he chose to feature in his Orkut profile albums.

## **2<sup>nd</sup> Example**

A woman was murdered, and her profile was made available to PGM members, along with the link to a news report narrating that her partner was the one who killed her. Some would visit her profile to try and find the profile of the partner, proceeding to analyse his profile as well, along with the victim's. For some PGM members, both profiles could offer insights into the couple's dynamics or even provide clues to an abusive relationship.

Thus, the discussion about the murdered woman on PGM would develop into conjectures, based on pictures, status updates and videos available on hers and his profiles. Why did other family members not see the danger the victim was in? Why did they not possibly do more to avoid the murder? Did she "provoke" her partner? Did she "deserve" it? The possibilities for debate, depending on each member's individual interpretation of the information made available, were quite diverse.

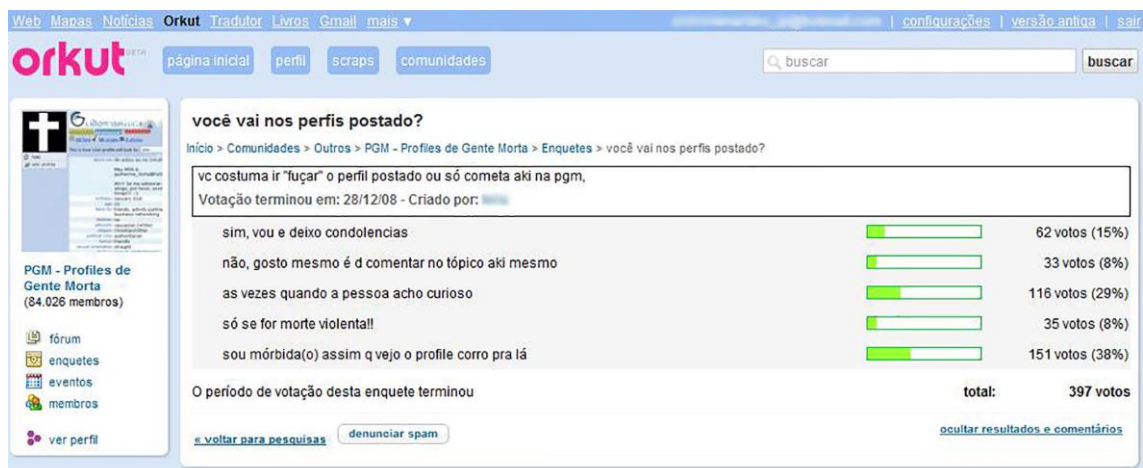


Figure 22 - Poll on visiting profiles posted on PGM (2009)

These cases are clear examples of how “passing value judgements” could easily escalate into disrespect towards the deceased or their family, and this practice was discouraged by the moderation team.

The question “Do you think this obsession with ‘the life of the dead’ is normal?”, posed to PGM members in the “Interview” topic, is not similar to the poll on visiting profiles. However, they were placed under the same section because one compliments the other.

In the question, the author uses the “life of the dead” expression to refer to the profiles, understood as a representation of their owners in life. In constructing this question, the creator classified the interest showed by PGM members as an obsession. Many even asked for a definition of “normal”, or claimed it was indeed “normal” to want to know what caused one’s death.

However, the majority agreed with the affirmation and said ‘Yes’ (106 answers, 75,17%) to the “obsession” being normal. The minority disagreed (26 answers, 18,43%). A few answers in this category listed curiosity as a basis for justifying their behaviour inside PGM, with members claiming to find it “understandable, but abnormal”, or that they “think death needs to be seen as something natural, even if it is a result of violence. And I think PGM showcases the reality of death in its crudest form, without masks”.

Four members (2,83%) answered “I don’t know” or “I don’t care”. There were six undetermined answers (4,25%).

### **3.4.2 On and Offline Behaviour – Leaving Messages on a Profile**

The action of leaving messages of condolences was somewhat different to the mere exploration of the profile of a deceased Orkut user. The matter was raised individually in a separate poll, which will be analysed now (Figure 23). This practice became common during Orkut’s years of popularity in Brazil and was not exclusive to PGM’s members; in fact, community’s rules were against it.

However, the decision to leave condolence scraps was still dependant on the users’ good sense. The title of the poll is “Do you leave a scrap for those who are gone? Why?” and by August 2011 it had 2.172 votes. The most voted options were: 1) ‘No, never, I prefer to be discreet’, followed by 2) ‘Sometimes, only when the death shocks me’, 3) ‘Yes, always, to wish a good passing’ and 4) ‘Yes, always, to give my condolences to family and friends’.

The tone of the options in this particular poll is quite different from the previous one on visiting the deceased's profiles, though it had an option which mentioned leaving messages of condolences. Of course, this can be linked to the fact that both polls were created by different people, but this is perhaps related to the way in which condolence messages are interpreted in Brazilian culture, more than anything else.

Though they can be linked to curiosity just as well as the act of visiting profiles, those messages are seen as an act of politeness, kindness, the acknowledgement of a loss. In this behaviour lies a certain expectation that the same would be done in one's own time of death, or that by doing this, one would be exercising one's social duty.

This is an old behaviour being put to practise with new tools, linking back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century Brazilian way of death, with its Catholic brotherhoods and the sense of social obligation towards assuring each member had an adequate passing, as explored in Chapter 3. The only difference is that these messages were not only posted on the profiles of deceased PGM members. Perhaps, it can also be linked to the old belief that the dead were able to intercede in favour of the living, or of their dead. This is, again, an old behaviour being put to practice with new tools.

However, the most voted option 'No, never, I prefer to be discreet' (1397 votes, 64%), can also be linked to what was discussed in Chapter 1, when the current death practices in Brazil was described, and to earlier in this chapter, when the 20<sup>th</sup> century behaviour towards death and dying changed completely. This relation becomes even stronger if the fact that the majority of PGM members were from or lived in densely populated areas is taken into consideration<sup>95</sup>, and the way in which funerary rituals are carried out in a metropolis nowadays is much more private. Therefore, since the deceased is a stranger, most people could feel that leaving a condolence message would be interpreted as invasive. It is not apparent if the deceased's family would feel affronted by a condolence message left by someone they did not know, but in doubt, many choose to avoid this, either online or offline.

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<sup>95</sup> The majority residing or being from the Southwest and South regions of the country, according to the first poll to be analysed in this chapter.

This avoidance could also be related to the fact that leaving such messages was forbidden by PGM's rules, so this answer perhaps reflected an accordance to them, especially because the poll could be seen by all PGM members, including the moderation team, and there could be a fear of reprisals from this behaviour.

The second most voted option was 'Sometimes, only when the death shocks me' (415 votes, 19%), which can be linked to what was mentioned previously, that some deaths are more interesting than others. In this case, there is also a feeling of pity, both for the survivors and the deceased themselves, and if death happened in violent or unexpected circumstances, condolence messages, even those left by strangers, can be understood as a means to attempt to comfort the living.

Options 3 and 4 are quite similar: 'Yes, always, to wish a good passing' (189 votes, 8%), and 'Yes, always, to give my condolences to family and friends' (171 votes, 7%), respectively. In these circumstances, it can be assumed that members who did leave messages of condolence do not distinguish deaths as worthy or unworthy of being acknowledged and offered their messages as a comfort to the deceased's friends and family, indiscriminately. Option 3 has a more religious undertone to it, because it relates to messages of condolence as a means to "wish a good passing" to the deceased, in a way aiding them in the afterlife, similarly to how funerary rituals as a whole are understood in Brazil, as discussed in Chapter 1.

A question from the "Interview with Members" topic that compliments this poll is "What is your opinion about the eventual posting of 'DEP' and 'RIP' messages on the deceased's profiles? Would you find it offensive if the deceased was someone close to you?" Answers were too diverse to quantify. Also, they were not straightforward enough to simply classify them as 'offensive' or 'not offensive'. This might be because the question referred to the use of the acronyms "RIP" and "DEP" specifically.



Figure 23 - Poll on leaving messages on profiles of deceased Orkut users (19.08.2011)

As aforementioned, these acronyms were appropriated by the PGM community as their particular language. Therefore, this could have been interpreted as excluding other forms of expressing condolences.

However, from the 127 valid answers, many were about not finding it offensive, but still being against it. The acronyms were defined as “useless”, “meaningless”, “wrong”, in the sense that they seemed fake or cold. Some members believed using them could be taken as “ridiculous”, “disrespectful”, “unethical” and that there were “other ways of wishing a peaceful passing” to someone they did not know, though they did not offer clues to what these other ways would be.

Since there were so many different ways of classifying the act of posting “RIP” and “DEP” on the profile of a deceased Orkut user, a word cloud was created to show which words were more commonly used. Words which appear to be bigger or bolder were the most commonly used ones (Figure 24).

There were also arguments that the use of “RIP” and “DEP” alone, instead of “Rest in Peace” and “*Descanse em Paz*” on the profile of the deceased, could confuse family members, because they might not know what the acronyms stand for. And if many PGM members would write them on the deceased’s scrapbook at the same time, this could be understood as invasive.

Others claimed they would not find it offensive because they would be wishing someone a peaceful passing anyway, and that this is the kind of discourse normally used in that situation. But many would still not do it simply because they did not know the deceased. One member claimed not knowing the meaning of the acronyms, while another affirmed it would depend on the situation for them to do so. One claimed to “not know what to do” and 11 gave undetermined answers.





### 3.5 Community Information – Most Common Causes of Death

As indicated by the analysis of previous polls, causes of death were an important theme of discussion on PGM. Because of this, members would try to investigate what really happened to a person with the aid of the press or by trying to source information locally, if the reported death happened in their city. Not rarely they offered possibilities and came up with their own theories, as aforementioned.

For this reason, this poll is understood as a sample of the members' own interpretations of the most common causes of death reported in the community. The title was "What kind of death do you think appears the most on PGM?". By 2011<sup>96</sup>, it had 2.426 votes and offered seven options: 1) 'Suicide', 2) 'Car accident', 3) 'Motorcycle accident', 4) 'Homicide', 5) 'Diseases', 6) 'Airplane crashes', and 7) 'None of the Above'. For analytical purposes, suicide is going to be addressed separately, at the end of this section.

The numbers of votes for 'Car accident' (695 votes, 28%) and 'Motorcycle accident' (360 votes, 14%) could easily be morphed into one, for they are both traffic accidents. Together, they would count up to 42% of the votes, which would not be an inaccurate interpretation of the most common causes of death featured in the community. This is because, in reality, traffic accidents are indeed so common in Brazil<sup>97</sup>, as mentioned in Chapter 1. More than 47,000 people die in traffic accidents in the country per year (Lajolo, 2017), bringing it to the 4<sup>th</sup> position in the Americas (WHO, n.d.).

The fourth most voted option was 'Homicides' (321 votes, 13%). As also briefly mentioned in Chapter 1, homicide is another main cause of death in Brazil<sup>98</sup> (Instituto Igarape, n.d.). In 2016, the country registered the highest number of violent deaths in the last decade: 61,000 (Prado, 2017). Because of this, it is not a surprise that this is one of the most common causes of death featured on PGM, as understood by the community members. Homicides, in the Brazilian context, could be a result of domestic violence or street crime, drug trafficking, confrontations with the police, or even reckless driving. Brazilian law

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<sup>96</sup> When the screenshot was taken, but the poll was created on 24.08.2007.

<sup>97</sup> I, for example, know at least three people who have died in traffic accidents in Brazil.

<sup>98</sup> Yet again, I know at least three victims of homicide in Brazil. One of them was my first boyfriend.

also differentiates premeditated murder from manslaughter, but both are very often referred to simply as homicide.

'Diseases' was the second least voted option in this poll, with 7% of the total (181 votes). This is a broad category which encompasses deaths caused by illnesses such as stroke (CVA), heart attack, pneumonia and diabetes, to name a few. These are the top four causes of death in Brazil, according to a 2013 study published in 2016 (Brazilian Ministry of Health, 2016). It is interesting to note that PGM users did not see these types of deaths as the ones which appeared the most in the community; this can perhaps be linked to the aforementioned idea of certain deaths being deemed more interesting than others, which can hinder the pre-eminence of the ones which are thought as less interesting.


It is possible that, in reality, these deaths were indeed the most common ones posted on PGM, but since they are, to a certain extent, foreseeable, they do not have the same impact factor as deaths by suicide or homicide.

The 'Airplane crashes' option only exists in the poll to begin with because in 2006 and 2007 there were two major airplane crashes in Brazil. The accidents were acknowledged by Orkut on its login page, which offered links to communities created for remembering and honouring the dead (Figure 25). On the 29<sup>th</sup> of September 2006, a Legacy jet collided with a Boeing in the Amazon Rainforest airspace, resulting in 154 dead. On the 17<sup>th</sup> of July 2007, a TAM plane coming from Porto Alegre was unable to stop when landing at *Congonhas* Airport, in São Paulo, causing 199 deaths.

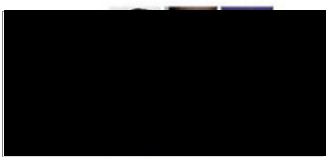
Because of this, the time in which this poll was created – August 2007 – was a time when two major air crashes had happened in Brazil, with 353 deaths in total. It is safe to assume that many of them were Orkut users, especially because of the popularity of the SNS in the country at that time, as aforementioned.


The last crash had happened only two months prior to this poll being created, and the previous, 11 months before. Then again, on the 31<sup>st</sup> of May 2009, Air France's 447 flight from Rio de Janeiro to Paris crashed into the Atlantic Ocean. From the 228 dead, 58 were Brazilians. The screenshot for this poll was retrieved in 2011, therefore it was open for votes by the time the 2009 accident happened. The option received 76 votes (3%).

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**login**  
Efetue login no orkut com o seu login do **orkut** ou

**Conta Google**

Nome de usuário/E-mail:

Senha:

☒ Salvar as minhas informações neste computador.

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Se você não tem uma Conta do Google, digite o seu nome de usuário e sua senha do orkut.

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Figure 25 - Orkut login page in memory of flight 1907 (29.09.2006)

To further illustrate the aforementioned concept of certain causes of death being more interesting than others, those deemed more popular are going to be compared with the 'Airplane crashes' option. Airplane accidents are random occurrences: there is no way to predict them, and one could even say that every time one boards a plane, one is possibly in danger.

This does not mean that homicides are not random in Brazil, because most of the time they are. Also, no one is 100% safe from mental illnesses which could impair one's judgement to the point of attempting suicide. But an airplane crash is completely out of one's control: life and death hang on the dexterity of the pilot. There's nothing one can do to avoid it, as opposed to the other causes of death mentioned before.

In addition, there are measures that can be adopted to avoid traffic accidents, becoming mentally sick or being a homicide victim, for example. There are treatments for mental issues; for traffic accidents, one can drive carefully, learn defensive driving, maintain a certain distance from the next car, always use seat belts, and not drink and drive, to name a few measures. For situations where death can be a result of violence, one can try to avoid getting involved in a fight or any altercation or steering clear from problematic relationships.

There are even smartphone apps to get informed about shootings<sup>99</sup> in the city of Rio de Janeiro, and for learning which locations are prone to crime, especially theft and robbery<sup>100</sup>, therefore trying to avoid them, if possible. If approached by a robber, the rule is to stay calm and do whatever the robber asks, and not behave in any unpredictable way, a measure Brazilians call 'not reacting'. 'Reacting' to an assault can be trying to escape, to harm or disarm the assailant, or doing anything other than what they command one to do. Therefore, despite deaths by airplane crashes being less common than any other in the poll, which could grant it an 'exceptional' quality, it is not one considered to be more interesting than others, according to PGM members.

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<sup>99</sup> One is known for its acronym, OTT, meaning *Onde Tem Tiroteio*. The name can be translated as something like 'Where is there a shooting'. The other is named *Fogo Cruzado*, which means 'Cross-Fire', in English.

<sup>100</sup> *Onde Fui Roubado*, which literally translates to 'Where I was Robbed'.

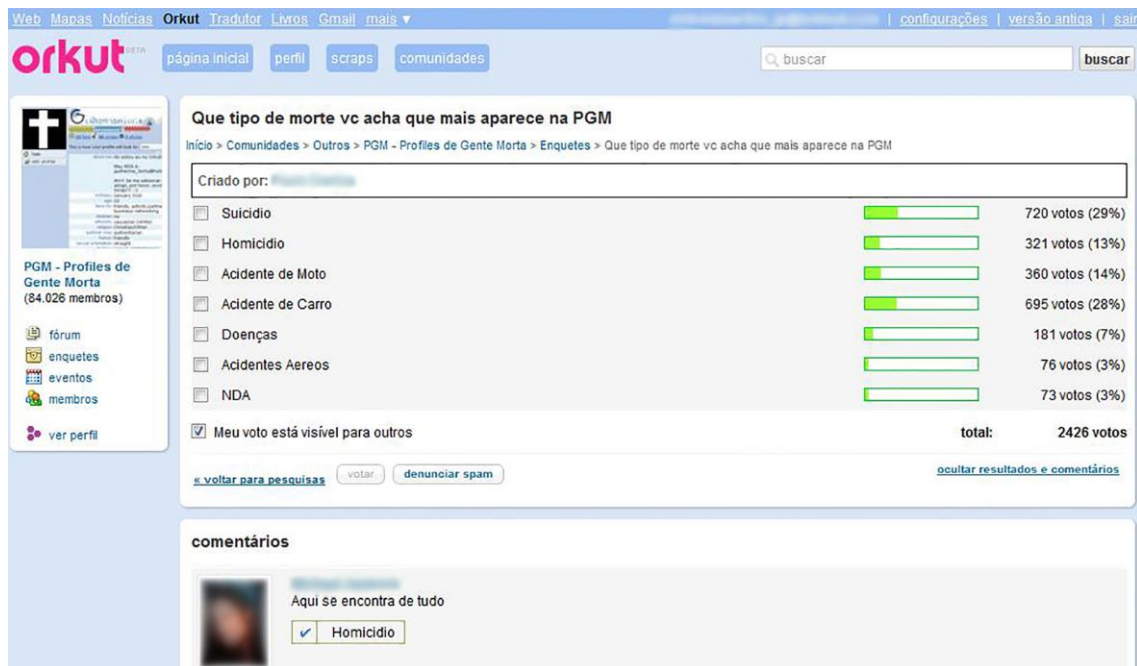


Figure 26 - Poll on the most common causes of death featured on PGM (24.08.2011)

The last and the least voted was the ‘None of the above’ option, with 73 votes (3%), only three more than the previous. One can only speculate about the reasons why this option was even available for voting. On the poll’s comments section, a member wrote: “In here you find everything” (Figure 26). Perhaps, that is exactly the meaning behind it: too many causes of death, so it is impossible to nominate the one which appeared on the community the most.

On the “Interview with members” post, a similar question asked: “What kind of death draws more attention?” It is not specified if the author meant the kind of death that draws the attention of the interviewee or the ones they think to be the most commonly posted in the community. Answers were given considering both scenarios; but overall, they reaffirmed the opinions given in the poll.

Again, the cause of death that proved to be more popular, according to PGM members, was ‘Suicide’, which will be analysed in the following section. Other answers mentioned ‘Death of young people and children’ (20 answers, 14,18%), ‘Homicides’ or ‘Murders’ (16 answers, 11,34%), ‘Any death’ (12 answers, 8,51%), ‘Accidents’ (8 answers, 5,67%) and ‘Diseases’ (3 answers, 2,12%). The number of undetermined answers was considerable: 17 (12,05%).

### **3.5.1 Suicide, the Most Voted Option**

Suicide was the most voted option in the “What kind of death do you think appears the most on PGM?” poll, with 720 votes (29%), and the most mentioned cause of death in the answers to the question “What kind of death draws more attention?”, with 65 answers (46.09%), part of the “Interview with Members” post.

Brazil ranks as the eighth in the world for this cause of death; in fact, one person dies by suicide in the country every 45 minutes (Senado Notícias, 2017)<sup>101</sup>. Tough common, suicide is rarely reported directly as a suicide in traditional, national Brazilian press. If someone jumped from a building the report will say the person “fell”, “slipped”, and other euphemisms, for example. The word is mostly avoided in fear of instigating others to do the same (WHO, 2000; ABP, n.d.<sup>102</sup>; CVV, 2017<sup>103</sup>). As mentioned earlier in this chapter, there are many

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<sup>101</sup> According to a psychiatrist from the Psychiatry Association of Brasília - *Associação Psiquiátrica de Brasília* (APBr).

<sup>102</sup> *Associação Brasileira de Psiquiatria* – Brazilian Association of Psychiatry.

<sup>103</sup> Centro de Valorização da Vida – Centre for the Valorisation of Life.

‘unofficial’ news websites and blogs in Brazil, which treat suicide cases less carefully and have no problem in reporting them as such.

Certainly, in smaller cities, their local media is quite likely to report on such incidents, but the family tends to try and hush them up. If this happens in a close-knit community, or a small town where everyone knows everyone, the chances of success in avoiding mentioning the word ‘suicide’ are higher. Not publicising a death as a suicide could be seen as a favour, especially because in small Brazilian towns, religion is even more present in everyday life, and there are complications that can derive from publicising suicide as a cause of death.

This was reinforced by Pope John Paul II, who, in two Encyclicals, classified suicide as an “intrinsically evil” act (*Veritatis Splendor*, 1993, p.77, article 80) and as “morally objectionable as murder” (*Evangelium Vitae*, 1995, p. 68, article 66). These publications reiterated the traditional view of suicide not only as a sin, but also as a crime (Mónica, 2016), a view which is not exclusive to the Roman Catholic faith.

The consequences of publicising a death by suicide as such can be very similar to those in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when it meant the refusal of certain death rites and an undignified burial at the cemetery, instead of inside the church, as mentioned in Chapter 3. However, what can be denied nowadays is only the performance of some rites<sup>104</sup>. However, the denial of these rites depends more and more on the judgement of the priest who is in charge of the local parish or who is hired to conduct the final prayer and bless the coffin at the end of the *velório*.

In a similar fashion to online reports created by the general public, on Orkut, the word suicide tended to appear more openly instead of just linked to cases deemed newsworthy by the traditional press. Because of this, and because the information made available on Orkut was inserted by regular people, it was indeed a receptacle of material originating from individuals with different behavioural, cultural and social backgrounds (Pieniz, 2009, p.3), as mentioned in the Methodology chapter. Then, suicide suddenly became more apparent to PGM

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<sup>104</sup> I mean “only” not as an attempt to diminish the importance of these rites, because to the faithful they are so important that, to have them denied, is a horrible thing. I used the word “only” as a means to highlight that, since church burials were forbidden from the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, now everyone in Brazil is buried in cemeteries. Therefore, the denial of a “*ad sanctos, apud ecclesiam*” (Ariès 1977, p. 41) burial is no longer a punishment.



members than any other cause of death because the group offered a 'peek' into the actual number of suicide cases in Brazil, as the profiles posted there belonged to ordinary people.

As a whole, suicide is still taboo in the country. Because of this, the family of the deceased could still choose to use Orkut as a vehicle to inform others about a death, but without mentioning suicide. Very often it happened that this very post became a place for those, shocked by the sudden death, to ask the family for clarification on what happened. The family could still choose to avoid mentioning suicide openly, and only talking about it privately, either online or in person.

Unfortunately, it was also common to see people who were informed about suicide as a cause of death in a private manner passing on the information in a public way, for all Orkut to see. This kind of misstep was a good source of information for PGM members, and one of the reasons why some were very keen on visiting the profiles of the deceased. To better illustrate this, two examples are provided next<sup>105</sup>:

### **1<sup>st</sup> Example**

A young woman died by suicide. Her family posts on Orkut about her death, without mentioning the cause of her death, inviting friends to the *velório*. One of these friends is extremely shocked by her untimely death, and proceeds to contact the family privately, either on Orkut itself or by other means. A family member tells her it was, in fact, a suicide. The friend then proceeds to post on her deceased friend's Orkut profile about how sad, hurt and guilty she feels. She mentions suicide as the cause of her friend's death. From then on, everyone who visited the deceased's profile would know that this is how she died.

### **2<sup>nd</sup> Example**

The media reports a teenager died after falling from the third floor of a shopping mall in Brasília. A PGM member reads this report and starts to search for the name of the victim in order to find their profile on Orkut. The name was made public on an 'unofficial' news blog, which reports that there have been several, similar cases in the same shopping mall, and that it is in fact locally

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<sup>105</sup> Both examples are based on cases witnessed on Orkut.

known as a place for suicide. After this, the member will post on PGM the link to the deceased's profile, together with the link to a news report, following the standardisation rule aforementioned: placing the name of the deceased between crosses and stating the cause of death right after it. Now this death by suicide is not only mentioned as such in unofficial news blogs, but also on Orkut, and there was no assurance that this information would only stay within PGM.

This direct way of communicating a death by suicide could happen on PGM because it was considered a safe space for discussing matters of death and dying, so a 'filter' would not be needed in reporting a suicide as a suicide. On the other hand, it is safe to say there were PGM members who were vulnerable themselves, and that reporting a suicide as such inside the community could also have led to serious consequences. However, this was never brought up as an issue by the moderation team, and I am not aware of members committing suicide after seeing other suicide cases in the community.

The analysis of the answers from a question on the "Interview with Members" post will be addressed next. This was a question entirely dedicated to the theme of suicide. The question was: "What is your opinion regarding the increasing (and terrifying) number of suicides reported in this community?". The question suggests that the number of suicide cases shown on PGM at that time was not only increasing, but it was also terrifying. Many individual answers contained different justifications in them, and not all members agreed with that affirmation. So, for analytical purposes, they were separated into two categories: 1) direct and 2) indirect answers. The second category has two subcategories: 2a) those who stated what they think suicide is and 2b) those who think suicide is a lack of something.

This categorisation was made in accordance with the order in which answers were written, for some were quite lengthy. While answering this particular question, four different participants claimed to have tried to commit suicide<sup>106</sup>.

### **1) Direct Answers**

Direct answers were those containing the interviewee's opinion on the increasing number of suicides, either agreeing or disagreeing with it, and also

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<sup>106</sup> But they did not mention the community as an influence on their behaviour.

how they felt about it. Answers agreeing that the numbers were ‘increasing’ and ‘terrifying’ counted up to 35 (24.82%). By this, they felt that suicide was a “reflection” or a “consequence” of the Brazilian society and of the world as a whole. They characterised either their country or the world as “soulless”, “futile” and “empty”, and that people and the world, in general, are “lost”. Some also claimed that suicide is related to “isolation”, “loneliness” and to an “increase in materialism”.

Others attributed the ‘increasing’ and ‘terrifying’ number of suicides to life and human relationships being “insignificant”, “meaningless” or “difficult”. They also claimed it was an act of “cowardice”, “lack of courage”, a moment when one cannot “stand” life any longer, or when the “pain” of living gets unbearable. There were mentions to the difficulty in “adapting” to a “constantly changing” world, “depression”, “banalisation of life” and general “lack” of love and support.

There were 18 (12.76%) answers which disagreed with the affirmation in the question, claiming the number of suicides did not increase, but the “interest” in them did, or that the “taboo against suicide” became “weaker”<sup>107</sup>, that it was a direct reflection of the “growing of the population”, that they “always existed”, or that it was simply being “more reported” than before.

On the topic of suicide being more reported than before, many concluded that it was just because of the increase of digital inclusion, that the Internet made them more visible, and, more than anything, that PGM itself made suicide appear to be more popular<sup>108</sup>.

## **2) Indirect Answers**

55 (39%) members gave indirect answers: that is, their answers did not state if they agreed that the numbers of suicide cases were ‘increasing’ or ‘terrifying’ but detailed what they believed to be reasons for committing suicide. There are two subcategories for these indirect answers: 2a) those who stated what they

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<sup>107</sup> Which can be understood as a biased view on the topic, especially because, as a PGM member, those who gave such answers were in fact being more informed about suicides than the rest of the country, based on the reasons mentioned previously. So, they could have assumed that, because suicides were openly reported and debated on PGM, they would also be openly reported and discussed outside of it. This is not the case.

<sup>108</sup> Possibly because Orkut was so popular in Brazil at that time, that any and every type of person had a profile.

think suicide is (32 answers, 58.18%) and 2b) those who think suicide is a lack of something (23 answers, 41.81%).

The majority of these 55 members fell in category 2a), expressing what they think suicide is, and managed to define it in 12 different ways. The most common one is that it is a result of “depression”, followed by it being a “weakness”, a “distanciation from religion”, an “act of despair”, a “matter of public health”, a “result from silly reasons”, linked to “craziness”, “lack of attention”, “egoism”, a result of the “use of drugs”, a way to “end suffering” and the result of a “corrupted familial structure”.

The other category, 2b), is related to those who believe suicide is a lack of something. This something, in its majority, would be “God” or “faith”, but also “love”, “hope”, “expectations” or “perspective”, “dialog”, “thinking”, “family values” or “education”. It is important to point out that even in answers which stated suicide was a lack of other things, the majority of them secondarily mentioned a “lack of God” as well. This is not surprising if one remembers that 88% of PGM members who answered the poll on religion, the second to be analysed in this chapter, declared to have theistic beliefs.

There were eight members (5.67%) with no opinion on the matter or who claimed to have never thought about it, while 25 others (17.73%) gave answers related to each individual having their “own reason”, or that the topic was “too polemic” for them to emit an opinion, or that there were “just too many reasons for it”, and that “each individual has a way to live, so they should also die in their own way”.

### **3.6 Community Information – Length of Participation in the PGM community**

In this poll, formulated in November 2007<sup>109</sup>, members were asked to determine for how long they had been part of the *Profiles de Gente Morta* community. The title was “How long have you been frequenting PGM?”, and it

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<sup>109</sup> 26.11.2007

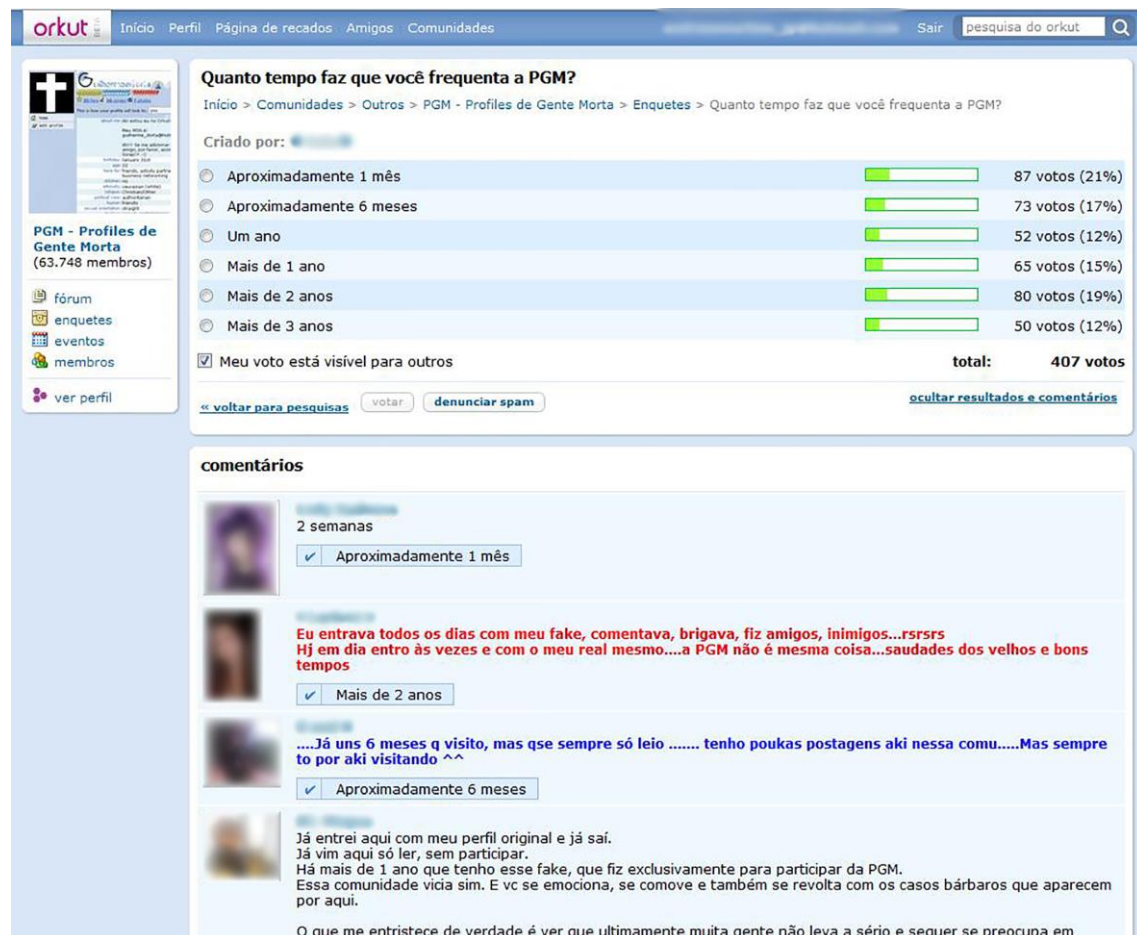


Figure 27 - Poll on the length of time of participation in the PGM community (26.11.2007)

had 407 answers (Figure 27). Voting options were: 1) 'Approximately a month' (87 votes, 21%), 2) 'More than two years' (80 votes, 19%), 3) 'Approximately six months' (73 votes, 17%), 3) 'More than a year' (65 votes, 15%), 4) 'More than three years' (50 votes, 12%) and 5) 'A year' (52 votes, 12%).

These numbers show that membership was steady, with little difference between them. Also, if the two most voted options are taken into consideration, they relate to new members, who had been part of the community for approximately a month, and to old members, who have been in the community for more than two years.

From the screenshot, four comments are visible on this poll. One is very expressive of the way some members understood the community:

I have entered here with my original profile and left. I have entered just to read, without participating. In more than a year I have been using this fake profile which I created specially to participate in PGM. This community is addictive, yes. And you get emotional, get moved and also revolted by the barbaric cases that appear here. Truthfully what makes me sad is seeing that lately a lot of people don't take it seriously and... (unreadable)".

This poll could be supplemented by the fourth poll to be analysed, "Why did you enter this community", and by the "Interview with Members" question "What led you to PGM", which were previously analysed together. In them, reasons to join and to remain a member were linked to curiosity, being interested in morbid subjects or to the group being recommended by a friend, to name a few.

### **3.7 Interview with Members – Posting the Profiles of Friends and Family**

A very interesting topic which was not covered by the polls, but only by the "Interview with Members" post, pertains to the act of posting, within PGM, profiles of people who were close to PGM members, like family and friends. This is interesting because PGM members analysed profiles and debated about the deaths of people who were unknown to them. Because this is a very particular question, it will be analysed separately.

The question asked: "Would you post the death of a close relative in this community (e.g. father, mother, children...)?" The majority of answers was positive, with 63 members (44.68%) saying that 'Yes', they would post the profiles

of relatives and/or friends on PGM. However, the numbers relating to those who answered negatively were very close: 52 (36.87%). 11 (7.80%) 'did not know', five (3.54%) replied that they could "maybe" do it, six (4.25%) answered 'it depends'. Four (2.83%) gave undetermined answers.

Many of those who gave a positive answer answered this way because they had already posted these types of profiles in the community. The reasons behind it, according to some of them, are because they see it as an "homage". Others who said 'yes' affirmed they did not have the opportunity to do so because the deceased did not have a profile on Orkut. Some members also said that they would feel "compelled" to post these profiles because they would feel "hypocritical" if they would hide their own loss, by not posting the links to profiles of people they did know, while lurking on the profiles of strangers.

For the negative answers, justifications ranged from because they "didn't like how some members behave", which is strongly linked to the passing of negative value judgements previously mentioned, to because they would not be in the "mood" to do it. Others claimed that not posting the profile of a loved one was a matter of "respect", or because they have posted profiles before and received negative comments from the deceased's family<sup>110</sup>, so they wouldn't do it with their own family.

Other negative answers were related to the owner of the profile being "against" it, otherwise they would, and the final justification was that they would not post the profiles themselves but would ask for another PGM member to do it. In this situation, some members claimed they would not post the profile right after death, but perhaps after a few days have elapsed. Others said they would not post the profile, but if it was posted by someone else, they would contribute by providing further information.

Some members who claimed to "not know" the answer to this question said so because they had not thought about the situation yet, or because they did not like to "imagine the death of a family member". Those who answered "maybe" claimed that it would depend on the deceased having a profile or if there was some kind of "lesson" to be taken from their death (e.g. cases of overdose or reckless driving). Answers categorised as "it depends" revolved around the kind

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<sup>110</sup> In the case of posting the profile of a friend.

of death (if suicide, definitely no), or on how they would feel about that particular death.

#### **4 The End of Orkut**

Between 2005 and 2008, Orkut grew to be the most popular social network site in Brazil. In 2009, when the “New Orkut” was introduced in order to accommodate changes, making the platform a little more similar to Facebook, many users became unsatisfied. It is very difficult to pinpoint the exact reasons which led Orkut to decrease in popularity in Brazil, but from that point on, the number of users started to decline.

In July 2011, Orkut had 29 million users, the highest in the SNS’ history. Nevertheless, a month later things had changed completely: Facebook surpassed Orkut with 30 million users (Silva, 2011), its popularity growing with the launching of the movie ‘The Social Network’, which narrates the creation of Facebook. Still, at first, most Brazilians kept a profile on both platforms, but as Facebook became more active, Orkut was slowly forgotten.

By 2014, when Orkut celebrated ten years, six million Brazilians still accessed the site (Agrela, 2014), but in June that year Google announced that it would be closed (Figure 28). In September 2014 Orkut came to an end and those interested in having a copy of their Orkut profile and pictures were advised to access a backup tool called Google Takeout<sup>111</sup>. Information and discussions in 52 million open communities could still be accessed on the Orkut Community Archive<sup>112</sup> (Figure 29), available until 2016.

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<sup>111</sup> Google Takeout was available until September 2016.

<sup>112</sup> Orkut Community Archive was available until September 2016.



## ^ Goodbye to Orkut

Orkut was [officially shut down](#) on September 30, 2014, but you can view public community discussions in the [Community Archive](#).

[Go to the Community Archive](#)

Other things you can do:

- + Delete your posts from the Community Archive
- + Report something in the Community Archive
- + Save your photos, scraps, & testimonials

*Figure 28 - Screenshot of a message sent to Orkut users, about the possibility to retrieve information using Google Takeout (11.03.2015)*

## Orkut Community Archive

From January 2004 to September 2014, millions of people, from around the world, came together to discuss common interests through a vast collection of Orkut communities. With the objective of preserving Orkut's history of connections and conversations, this archive contains all public content from those communities. Please visit our [Help Center](#) for further details.

Explore



*Figure 29 - Message on the existence of Orkut Community Archive (11.03.2015)*

## 5 Summary

This chapter provided a brief discussion of how Brazilian death rituals were established in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, after the revolution that started in the 1800's. It also introduced the history of the Internet in Brazil, while focusing on the development of the Internet in the country for death-related uses. It introduced Orkut, the social network in which the *Profiles de Gente Morta* community was founded, and presented the group through explaining its modus operandi, its rules, and through an overview of its members.

This overview covered a few aspects of those who composed PGM, by analysing ten polls about varied subjects, which have shown that the majority of PGM members who answered the polls and questions on the "Interview with Members" post, were Catholic, from the Southeast, who did not use a fake profile to access PGM. They joined the community because they thought it was interesting to see profiles of deceased Orkut users. They believed their participation in the PGM community triggered them to be more thoughtful about life and death.

The majority, contrary to the norm in the country, wanted to be cremated and would have liked to have their own profiles posted on PGM by the time of their deaths. They considered themselves as 'morbid', in the sense that they visited the profiles posted in the community, and thought their behaviour was normal. The majority, however, did not like to leave condolences messages on the profiles of deceased Orkut users who they did not know, but their opinions were divided about posting of 'DEP' and 'RIP' on those profiles. The most common cause of death reported on PGM, to them, were suicides, and they believed suicide cases were becoming more common, a result of depression and of a "lack of God".

These members had been participating in the PGM community from a month to more than two years, and the majority of them would post the profiles of their family and friends in the community if they died.

The next chapter deals with PGM's move to Facebook, its establishment in the new social network, introducing some changes which arose from the move, while also presenting some new technological developments in Brazil.

## **Chapter 5: The *Profiles de Gente Morta* Group on Facebook**

This chapter deals with the transition of the *Profiles de Gente Morta* (PGM) from Orkut to Facebook and its establishment on the new platform. Firstly, it addresses Facebook's début in Brazil and enumerates the reasons which led it to become the most accessed social media site in the country. Facebook's features will not be discussed in detail, as it was done with Orkut in the previous chapter, because Facebook is still active, and the changes which are made to the way it works, and to the services it provides, would mean that there is a high chance of the description becoming quickly outdated.

For this purpose, this chapter will concentrate on PGM and how it is now working on Facebook, highlighting changes, differences and similarities in its dynamics in comparison to Orkut. It will also provide a further insight into the development of the roles I have accumulated on PGM over the years, previously mentioned in Chapter 2: first as a member, then as a researcher, and later as part of the administrating team. Lastly, results from a questionnaire presented to the group between December 2015 and February 2016 will be analysed.

### **1 Facebook, a Brief Overview**

Facebook - or TheFacebook.com, as it was originally named - was launched in January 2004 by then 19-year old Harvard sophomore Mark Zuckerberg and his Brazilian roommate, Eduardo Saverin. The site was involved in legal disputes since its creation, and after financial settlements Zuckerberg maintained its ownership (Carlson, 2010). At first, the service was available for Harvard students only, but as it grew in popularity, it became available at Stanford, Columbia and Yale, then other Ivy-League and Boston-area schools, shortly thereafter reaching Canada and other North American institutions. The company stopped using the 'The' on its name after purchasing the domain *facebook.com* in the beginning of 2005 (Williams, 2007)<sup>113</sup>.

Throughout 2005, Facebook expanded to twenty-one universities in the United Kingdom and others around the world. Later, it extended the possibility of membership to employees of companies like Apple and Microsoft and, in

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<sup>113</sup> The domain price was 200,000 US Dollars.

September 2006, it became available to the general public as long as users were aged 13 years or older and had a valid e-mail address.

Facebook is structured in a similar fashion to other online social networks before it. It is basically composed of a profile which displays information provided by the user, e.g. photos, name, place of residence, current and past jobs, education level and relationship status. The profile also has sections that allow messages to be exchanged privately or publicly, depending on the profile owner's privacy settings. In the 'News Feed', or 'Timeline', it is possible to see posts and activities<sup>114</sup> from Facebook contacts.

If communities made Orkut unique, the 'like button' is the feature that distinguished Facebook amongst other social network sites. The 'like' is a feature through which users can express their enjoyment, agreement or endorsement to contents such as status updates, comments, photos, links and any other content shared on Facebook. In February 2016, new reactions were introduced: 'loved', 'wow', 'haha', 'sad' and 'anger' (Stinson, 2016).

'Status updates' allow users to inform their friends about interesting things such as videos, photos and links. These status updates appear on one's 'news feed'. The equivalent to Orkut's communities on Facebook are groups. A group, according to Facebook's guidelines, is

a space to communicate about shared interests with certain people. You can create a group for anything — your family reunion, your after-work sports team, your book club — and customize the group's privacy settings depending on who you want to be able to join and see the group (Facebook Help Centre, n.d.).

As described, groups can be about any topic of interest, and there are three different privacy settings: public, closed and secret, as previously mentioned in Chapter 2:

When you create a group, you can choose 3 privacy settings: Public, Closed and Secret. The table below shows who can join these groups and what people can see about them. All groups require member approval by either an admin or group member depending on the group's settings (Facebook Help Centre, n.d.)

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<sup>114</sup> Such as the upload of pictures or videos, sharing posts, check-ins and more.

	Public	Closed	Secret
Who can see the group and request to join?	Anyone	Anyone	Current members and anyone invited by a member
Who can be added or invited by a member?	Anyone who is a friend of the member or invited by email by the member	Anyone who is a friend of the member or invited by email by the member	Anyone who is a friend of the member or invited by email by the member
Who can see the group's name?	Anyone	Anyone	Current members or anyone invited by email by a member
Who can see who's in the group?	Anyone	Anyone	Current members
Who can see the group description?	Anyone	Anyone	Current and former members
Who can see the group location?	Anyone	Anyone	Current and former members
Who can see what members post in the group?	Anyone	Current and invited members	Current and invited members
Who can find the group in search?	Anyone	Anyone	Current members
Who can see stories about the group on Facebook (ex: News Feed and search)?	Anyone	Current and invited members	Current and invited members

Figure 30 - Table listing group privacy settings on Facebook

A table (Figure 30) details the main differences between Facebook's privacy settings when it comes to groups. As mentioned previously in Chapter 2, the Dead People Profiles group was created as a closed one on Facebook, but later its privacy settings were raised to secret. This change will be addressed further in this chapter.

## **1.1 Facebook's Establishment in Brazil**

Regardless of its success all over the world, and the involvement of a Brazilian in its creation, Facebook was not instantly attractive to Brazilians; the main cause was that Orkut dominated the scene, as explored in the previous chapter. In 2008, Facebook added the domain ".br" to its Brazilian URL<sup>115</sup>, but by that time it had around 200,000 users in the country, nothing compared to the millions on Orkut (Pellegrini, 2012).

The situation began to shift by the beginning of the year 2010, when Brazil was going through a prosperous economic phase leading to an increase of Brazilians going abroad (UNWTO, 2014)<sup>116</sup>. Apart from Brazil, the majority of Orkut users were from India, still an uncommon travel destination for Brazilians. Therefore, as Brazilians travelled to more popular countries such as the U.S. and England, for example, a need to create a Facebook account, in order to keep in touch with friends from these other countries, was generated. This contributed to Brazil's gradual insertion on Zuckerberg's social network<sup>117</sup> (Pellegrini, 2012).

In May 2010, Facebook joined forces with mobile operator TIM Brazil to launch a free access service to the site using mobile devices operated by the phone company (Veloso, 2010)<sup>118</sup>. During that year, the Brazilian population on the Internet jumped to 40 million, making it the 8th country with the largest number of Internet users in the world (Taborda, 2011).

However, the biggest factor in boosting Facebook's popularity in Brazil was the premiere of 'The Social Network' movie in December 2010 (Miller, 2010),

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<sup>115</sup> Uniform Resource Locator: a protocol for specifying addresses on the Internet.

<sup>116</sup> The number of Brazilians going on international trips grew 62% from 2000 to 2010, reaching 5.3 million trips in 2010. Data from the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). The original link to the report is no longer available.

<sup>117</sup> Government-funded student-exchange programs were strengthened in the period, like Science Without Borders, created in July 2011.

<sup>118</sup> Although the service was free for users of pre and post-paid plans, it caused many problems by making unauthorised charges to pre-paid users.

which helped in its democratisation in the country by introducing it to economically lower classes. After the movie, Brazilians began to slowly create their profiles on Facebook, while still maintaining their Orkut ones. Roughly eight months later, in August 2011, Facebook finally surpassed Orkut's numbers in Brazil (G1, 2011). By 2012, it reached the record of 1 billion users worldwide (Folha, 2012)<sup>119</sup>. As Facebook grew stronger, the Dead People Profiles community also migrated to Facebook. There, it was no longer a community, but a group. Or two<sup>120</sup>.

## 2 PGM Moves to Facebook

The Dead People Profiles community migrated to Facebook in 2012 as two different groups, after a fallout between its most preeminent members. Both had very similar names: *PGM – Profiles de Gente Morta* and *Profiles de Gente Morta*, which coexisted with similar *modus operandi* and rules. The one simply named *Profiles de Gente Morta* gathered more members than the other, and by 2014 it was self-proclaimed as the 'original' one (Figure 31).

By November 2016 (Alvim, 2016), however, the situation had completely changed, and the other group then had many more participants than the 'original' one. This study is focused on the group considered as the original<sup>121</sup>.

In the same fashion as the Orkut community, PGM on Facebook was a closed group, that is: any Facebook user was able to search for the group and request to join, but membership was only completed after the request was approved by the owner or its administrators. The group's profile and cover pictures, as well as its description, which includes its rules, were visible to all. But its general content could only be seen once membership was confirmed. This general content is composed of, amongst other things, links to profiles of deceased Facebook users, which are made available in different and individual posts.

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<sup>119</sup> On 04.10.2012.

<sup>120</sup> Facebook does not have communities, but groups. Therefore, this is why PGM became a group on Facebook, and it is how it will be addressed in this context.

<sup>121</sup> In 2012, when those two groups migrated to Facebook, I was part of both of them. But for an unknown reason and at the time I was not able to pinpoint, I was excluded from the 'other' PGM and could never re-join it, despite a handful of requests.





Figure 31 - Facebook-PGM main page (11.03.2015)

Those posts are located in the group's discussion forum, which also include sections where it is possible to see and search through all the group's members and past posts, to post and create events, share photos, files and invite new members. It is also where links to virtual wakes can be found.

PGM was already an established source of information on death and dying by the time it joined Facebook (Martins, 2009; 2013), so as Orkut-PGM members created their profiles on Facebook, they also looked into joining the group on the new platform. Figure 31 is from 2015, three years after PGM had migrated to Facebook, and it shows that it had a little over 14,000 members. The first post is from the group's owner, asking members to read the rules, for which he provided a link, but they were also available in the 'About' section, on the right of the image, which also shows that the group was a closed one.

By the time PGM reached its peak on Orkut, it had more than 80,000 members. After six years<sup>122</sup> on Facebook, the number is still considerably smaller: 15.670<sup>123</sup>. Possible reasons for this disparity can be the increased awareness of mental health issues and the influence this type of group can possibly have on those suffering from them, or that seeing and talking about death can depress members, so they do not stay, or that people are just quitting using social network sites altogether. Another reason can be that potential PGM members prefer the 'other' PGM over the one in which this work is focused on exactly because it has more participants.

## 2.1 Rules

In a similar way to the original setting on Orkut, the PGM group on Facebook also has a set of rules members must abide by in order to participate. In general, they are a reduced version of the rules first presented on Orkut, but some were tweaked to accommodate changes in the behaviour and in the technologies that have since become available. On Facebook, PGM's rules are as follows:

>>> GROUP RULES <<<

- This is a group for posting [links to] Facebook profiles of dead people. By joining the group, please read the rules to the end.
- "OFF" TOPICS: ONLY allowed for issues related to the death of famous people (who do not have a profile).

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<sup>122</sup> As of February 2018.

<sup>123</sup> In 09.02.2018.

\* Please avoid polluting the group with VARIOUS OFF TOPICS (even if they are related to the group's content).

\* If an excessive number of OFF topics is detected, they will be deleted immediately. Also, members who insist on polluting the group with OFF topics will be banned.

- Any personal offence is not permitted, towards members of the group or the deceased. The first occurrence will result in a complaint and if it happens again [the member] will be banned (BAN).

- The member who reports posts to Facebook will be summarily banned from the group. When identifying a topic/comment that violates the rules, rather than reporting it to Facebook, please tag one of the moderators<sup>124</sup> and we will act upon it.

- It is not allowed to make comments on the profiles of the deceased; for example, asking how or when they died, etc. It is also not allowed to make comments about PGM on the deceased's profile. Be discreet and avoid asking any questions even to family and close friends of the deceased. There is a risk of being banned if one fails to comply with this rule.

- Avoid chatting on topics containing links to profiles of deceased users. If you want to chat with another member, use the Facebook chat<sup>125</sup>. Those who insist on chatting may be banned without notice.

- CONTACT: Complaints and suggestions [should be sent] only by email. Send to [contato@pgmsite.com.br](mailto:contato@pgmsite.com.br)  
Topics created for complaining or making suggestions about the group will be deleted as soon as they are detected. If you have something to tell us, use the email.

- The moderation team can delete any topic or comment it deems inappropriate to the content of the group.

- It is not allowed to advertise other groups/pages or WhatsApp groups without permission from the moderation team. Those who insist will be banned from the group and their post, deleted. Members participating and posting on a topic of this kind will also be banned.

- THE POSTING OF GORE PHOTOS/VIDEOS (EXCEPT IF CONTAINED ON NEWS ARTICLES) IS PROHIBITED. WHOEVER POSTS OR ASKS FOR THIS TYPE OF PHOTO/VIDEO MAY BE BANNED FROM THE GROUP.

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<sup>124</sup> The owner of PGM on Facebook, when writing the group's rules, used the term 'Moderators', which was the one used on Orkut. However, they are called 'Administrators' on Facebook, and this is how they will be addressed in this context.

<sup>125</sup> Which is what the private messaging feature on Facebook is sometimes called.

- STANDARDISING TOPICS: It's not a rule, but we suggest you follow the pattern: cross symbol + deceased's name + cause of death + cross symbol. Example: † John Smith - leukaemia †. If you cannot do the 'little cross', you can use the + sign. Example: + John Doe - Cause of death +.

When the cause is unknown, use NSC (meaning: I do not know the cause)<sup>126</sup>.

Preferably, after the name of the deceased, you should post a link to a news article confirming the death of that particular person. Avoid making personal comments and remarks while writing the post. Leave the post "clean" and summarised.

- ABBREVIATIONS<sup>127</sup>: DEP (Descanse em Paz)<sup>128</sup>, NSC (I do not know the cause), BBBM (A good criminal is a dead criminal), JFP (Already posted), RIP (Rest in Peace), IT (Irrelevant Topic).

The rules start by shortly describing what the group is about, while asking potential members to read them carefully. The first rules are about OFF topics, which were initially treated in a much stricter way, by allowing their use only for sharing deaths of celebrities and public personas who did not have a Facebook profile. However, as time passed, this rule has become much more flexible and OFF topics are now allowed more freely, especially for sharing certain journalistic reports on the theme of death and dying. The warning to avoid "polluting" the group with OFF topics and the consequences of such activity remains the same.

The following issue to be addressed is related to disrespect, which is also very similar to the way the problem was treated on Orkut: it was a cause for exclusion, or as the rules state, being banned from the group.

Reporting problems on the group, covered in the next rule, has changed a little. On Orkut, it was possible to contact the social network site's administration and report inadequate content, but somehow that was quite unheard of inside PGM. Breaking of rules was to be directly addressed by the community owner or the moderators via "scrap". On Facebook, the habit of denouncing inappropriate content became more popular, an issue which will be further addressed when dealing with my own experiences in the group as a member, researcher and administrator. The rule now was to 'tag' one of the administrators, flagging up the problematic post, so they could act upon it.

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<sup>126</sup> Acronym for "Não sei a causa" in Portuguese.

<sup>127</sup> Which are, in a reality, a mix of initials and acronyms rather than abbreviations.

<sup>128</sup> Rest in Peace, in Portuguese.

Tagging is a feature that did not exist on Orkut. In addition to contacting the moderation team via scrap, proof of unlawful behaviour, according to the community's rules, was to be obtained by a screenshot. Now, with the possibility of tagging, the administrator can see exactly what is wrong, as the events unfold, and screenshots are only taken as a safety measure, in case whoever is 'in the wrong' decides to delete their problematic post or comment, trying to avoid punishment in this way.

Posting on the profiles of deceased Facebook users was approached in the next rule, which, similarly to the one on Orkut, forbade the practice. However, this new one is an abridged version of the previous, giving examples of exactly what is forbidden, like asking about the cause of death to the deceased's family and friends or making any comments which would make PGM's existence known to them.

The rule on chatting on topics which contain links to profiles of deceased Facebook users remains the same as it was on Orkut, but the following one informs members about the existence of an email address<sup>129</sup>, created exclusively to deal with problems related to PGM. This email was the preferred way of communicating with the owner of the group. This is a different approach than the one used on Orkut-PGM, which was the PGM Moderation community, as described in the previous chapter. The deletion of topics which were deemed inappropriate by the administrators could, as before, be carried out by them.

Advertising of other groups or pages, instead of being completely forbidden as it was on Orkut, became allowed, as long as it was approved by the administrators. In addition, the rule mentions WhatsApp<sup>130</sup> groups dedicated to sharing gore pictures and videos, which is new. This is something that did not exist during Orkut times, for WhatsApp was first introduced to the public in January 2010, and only became popular in Brazil<sup>131</sup> a couple of years later. Advertising such groups or pages without the consent of the administrators, was punishable by the exclusion from PGM.

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<sup>129</sup> The email was linked to a website, named PGMsite.com.br, created by the owner of the group on Facebook. The website was a type of backup for the data posted in the group and organised the names and links to the profiles of deceased Facebook users in alphabetic order. The website was deactivated some time in 2015, along with the email address.

<sup>130</sup> An app for exchanging instant text and audio messages, as well as images and videos, via a smartphone.

<sup>131</sup> WhatsApp became popular in Brazil because it offered the possibility to exchange messages between smartphones without having to pay for each one of them, which was the case with SMS.

The rule forbidding posting gore images and videos directly to the group was extended to mention that such imagery was only allowed if contained in an external link. This is a development of the increasing popularity of the alternative news blogs mentioned in the previous chapter.

Standardising, the theme of the next rule, became a little more flexible. However, in 2016, the moderation team decided to make standardisation 'stricter' again, by directly asking members to follow it. A development of this rule was the inclusion of the request for keeping the post 'clean and summarised' by avoiding making comments or emitting opinions when providing the name and link to the profile of a deceased Facebook user.

The last topic to be covered in the rules section was not a rule, but a list of acronyms used as PGM's vocabulary. Apart from the already known expressions, as explained in the previous chapter, the list includes a new one, BBBM: *Bandido bom é bandido morto*, which stands for 'a good criminal is a dead criminal'. This will be developed further along in this chapter.

As shown by the alterations that have been made to Facebook-PGM's rules, the group's dynamics have changed. Many factors contributed to it: the popularisation of smartphones and mobile Internet connection is undoubtedly the main one, because it has also changed the way people behave offline. Instantaneous communication and constant access to a plethora of information online now means that posting has become a real-time activity, for one no longer needs to go to a computer in order to be online, like it was during Orkut times. We now carry computers in our pockets which allow us to be online 24/7.

Facebook's own interface, which allows users to tag each other in posts they consider to be of interest to the other, and to 'save' a particular post to follow its future development<sup>132</sup>, also contributed to changing the way Facebook-PGM members behave.

In a similar way to Orkut, however, the link to the profiles of deceased Facebook users enables PGM members to learn more about them. That is understandable especially considering that, on this type of social network site, profiles can be used as a representation of an individual, more so than on Orkut, all depending on privacy settings.

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<sup>132</sup> Instead of a whole page, as offered by Internet browsers.

Now, after death, a Facebook profile can be transformed. Again, depending on privacy settings, it can become an obituary or a eulogy of/for the deceased, written by themselves, either for friends and family only or for Facebook as a whole. In addition, especially in the Brazilian setting, the profile can still become a converging point for information about how its owner died, for communicating the time and date of the *velório*, and of demonstrations of grief, in the same way as Orkut profiles and posthumous communities did.

But in 2009 Facebook introduced a feature allowing profiles to be memorialised, that is: following a death, friends or family of the deceased can get in touch with Facebook to alert them about it, and after providing documental proof, the profile can be either deleted or memorialised. Memorialised profiles have effectively substituted memorial communities as they were on Orkut.

When addressing the subject of memorialised accounts, Facebook's Help Centre mentions the possibility of appointing a legacy contact, providing a link which explains what it actually is. With these options, it is now possible to ensure a Facebook profile actually survives its owner, according to hers/his own wishes. This is another difference between Orkut and Facebook. On Orkut, there were no such options, and those aware of the possibility of their profile outliving them, would mainly share their password and ask for friends and/or family to control or delete their account for them after their death. This behaviour, however, was not encouraged, for privacy reasons.

## **2.2 Carrying out Different Roles on PGM<sup>133</sup>**

As mentioned previously, I have been part of PGM since 2008: initially, I was a member like thousands of others. But only a couple of months after joining I acquired a new role in the community, still on Orkut, when I started my undergraduate research (Martins, 2009). From then on, I was a member and a researcher, a role I maintained for my Master's degree (Martins, 2013). Both investigations were carried out with a qualitative aspect to them; however, I also formulated polls and private interviews with the most active members at that time.

After PGM moved to Facebook, some of these members became more than informants and gatekeepers, in the same sense proposed by O'Reilly (2009). One

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<sup>133</sup> Since this section is mainly about my experience inside Facebook-PGM, it is mostly written in the first person.

of them was the owner of the group on Facebook, and they added me as an administrator in July 2015, when I was already carrying out the research for this doctoral thesis. This new role gave me a privileged position for this research, because it allowed me to access PGM's backstage (Goffman, 1959). Then, I became more than a member and a researcher: I became an administrator, responsible for keeping PGM working.

The two previous roles could be carried out concomitantly, but when I became a member of the administration team, these three roles sometimes needed to be alternated to avoid conflicts. Two such conflicts will be described in the following section. By describing these conflicts, some of the different aspects and tools PGM has gained after moving to Facebook will also be explained (Martins, 2017).

### **2.2.1 1<sup>st</sup> Case: PGM in Danger**

In February 2016, some members were unhappy with the way one of PGM's administrators behaved, and, as a retaliation, they got together with the objective of causing as much damage to the group as possible. Those who were displeased started to randomly report PGM posts directly to Facebook. When a group or profile is repeatedly reported, Facebook can decide to remove it, according to its Help Centre<sup>134</sup>. Those reports were reviewed by Facebook as they were submitted, and Facebook replied, through notifications to PGM admins, that those posts did not violate Facebook's community standards, therefore they would not be removed (Figure 32). The answers we received were standard, automatic ones. Since the posts which were reported contained themes that are normally debated on PGM, such as murder or suicide, Facebook understood that there was no violation.

As an attempt to stop the attack, members of the administration team decided to exclude around 30 new members who were admitted into the group on the same day the attacks began, deducing they were the ones responsible for the high number of reports sent directly to Facebook. The group's settings were changed so that new posts had to be reviewed by an administrator before being made available to the rest of the group. Seven days had elapsed from this

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<sup>134</sup> Available at <https://www.facebook.com/help/103796063044734?helpref=related>. Accessed 31.05.2018.



decision when private messages were sent to the administrator with which the attackers were displeased with.

This administrator then took a screenshot of the threatening messages and sent it to the other administrators<sup>135</sup> in order to discuss what could be done.

Shortly after this first threatening message was sent, another member of the administration was targeted. To avoid the possibility of PGM being deactivated by Facebook, since reports were still being sent directly to the social network site's administration, other safety measures had to be adopted by PGM's admins. First, recent posts which were criticising the group were deleted. Then, members with notably fake profiles were excluded<sup>136</sup>. Then, the acceptance of new members was suspended for around three days, forming a 'queue' of membership requests. Lastly, the group's privacy settings were changed from 'closed' to 'secret', an irreversible decision, which reduced the ways in which the group could be accessed, as shown in the table at the beginning of this chapter (Figure 30).

Figure 33 shows, in red, that there were more than 20 membership requests to be revised during the attack period. However, the actual number of pending requests is unknown. As the adopted measures did not stop the attack, for the reports to Facebook continued and admins thought PGM was in potential danger, I decided to intervene. Admins were afraid of PGM being closed by Facebook as a result of the continuous reports, which at one point were being made at the speed of one per minute.

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<sup>135</sup> Facebook-PGM admins have a private group that is used to deliberate about the main group's administration, but it will not be covered in this thesis.

<sup>136</sup> Profiles which contained little information on them or obviously fake information, like celebrity or cartoon characters names and photos as their profile picture, for example.

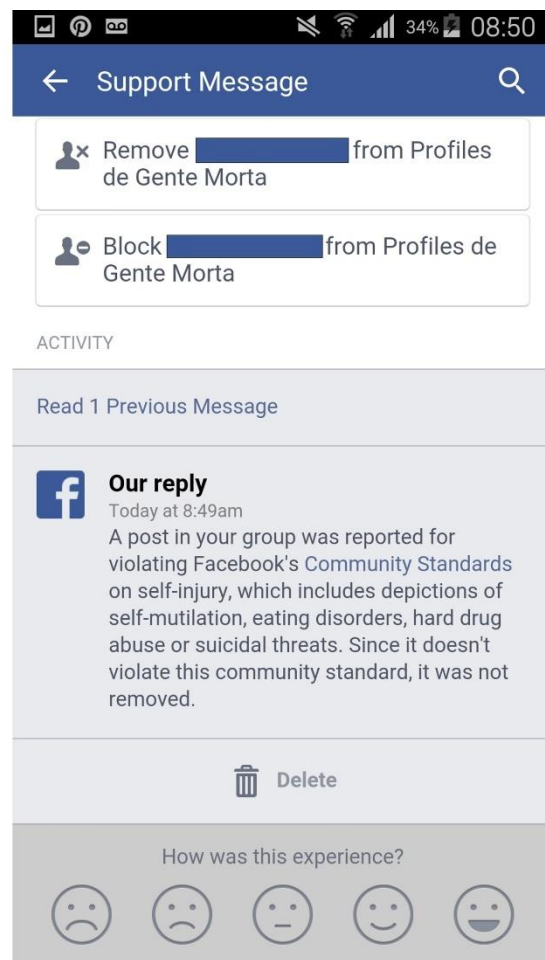
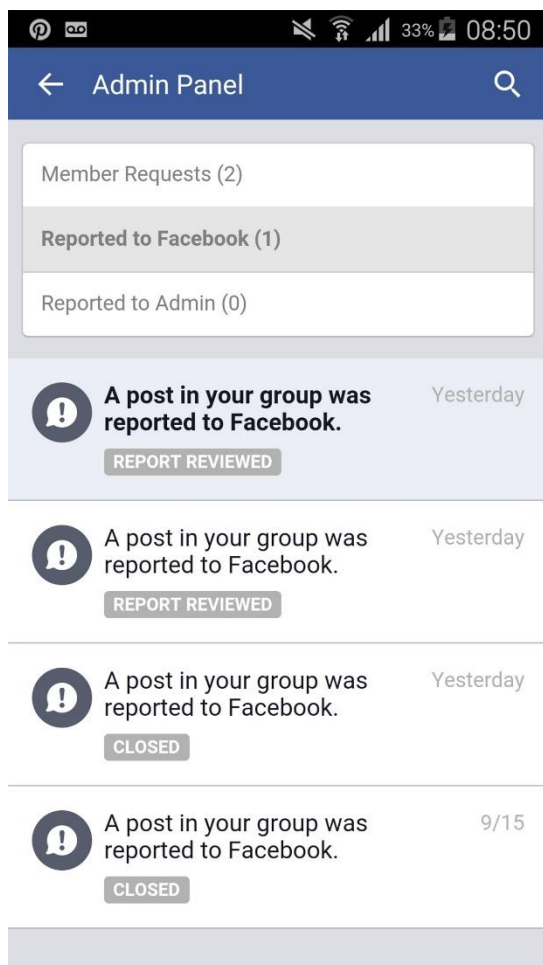


Figure 32 - Notification about reported content and the outcome of the report (February 2016)



Figure 33 - Queue of membership requests during the attack on PGM (15.02.2016)

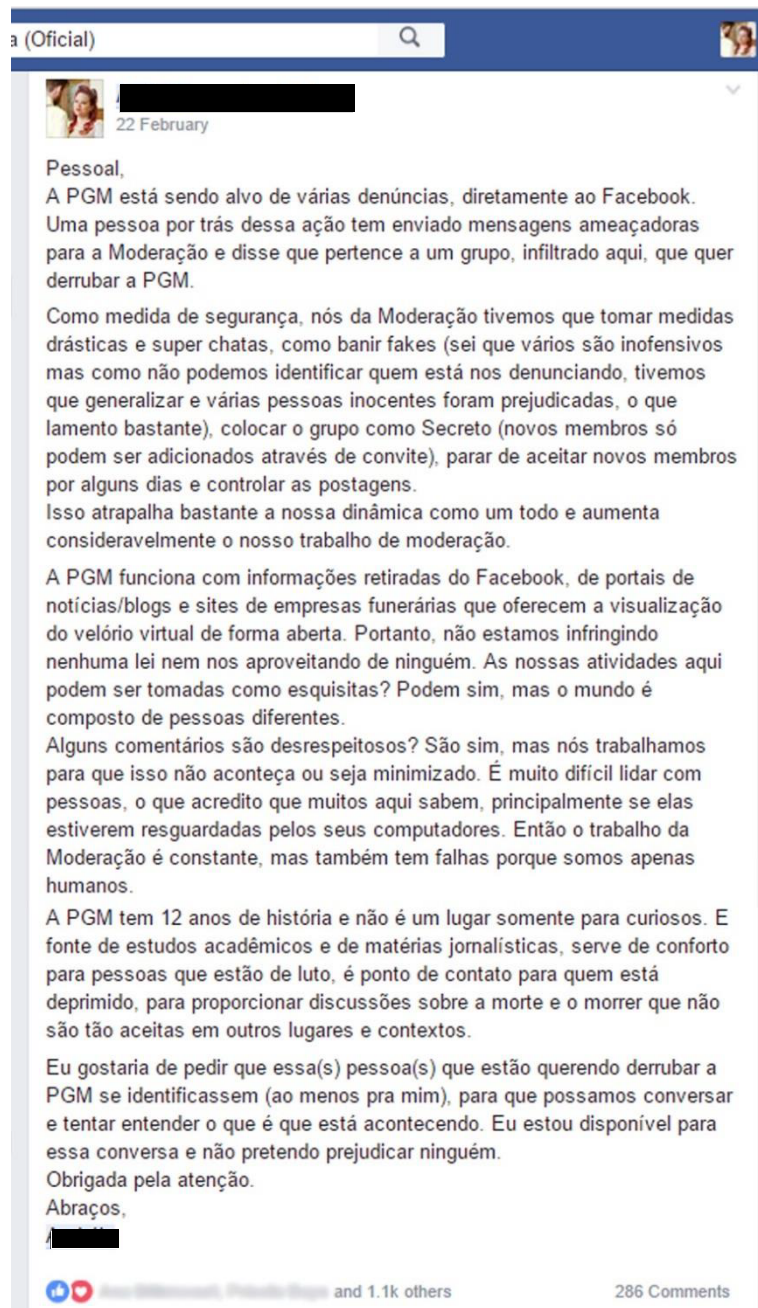


Figure 34 - Post about the attack on PGM (22.02.2016)

After a brief debate with the administration team, I created a post to all PGM members (Figure 34) explaining what was happening, the need for changes that were recently implemented and asking those responsible for the attack to get in touch with me, privately.

The complete post was:

Folks,  
PGM is being targeted by several complaints, sent directly to Facebook. A person behind this action has sent threatening messages to the Moderation<sup>137</sup> and said that they belong to a group, infiltrated here, that wants to overthrow PGM.

As a safety measure, we, the Moderation, had to take drastic and annoying measures, such as banishing fakes (I know that several are harmless, but since we cannot identify who is reporting us, we had to generalise and several innocent people were harmed, which I deeply regret), put the group as Secret (new members can only be added by invitation), stop accepting new members for a few days, and start reviewing posts.

This greatly disrupts our dynamics as a whole and considerably increases our moderation work.

PGM works with information taken from Facebook, journalistic reports and blogs, and sites from funeral homes that offer open viewing of virtual wakes. Therefore, we are not breaking any law or taking advantage of anyone. Can our activities here be taken as weird? They may, but the world is made up of different people.

Are some comments disrespectful? Yes, they are, but we work so that it does not happen or is at least minimised. It is very difficult to deal with people, which I believe many here are aware of, especially if they are guarded by their computers. So, the Moderation's work is constant, but it also has failures because we are only human.

PGM has 12 years of history and is not just a place for the curious. It is a source of academic studies and journalism, it serves as a comfort for people in mourning, as a point of contact for those who are depressed, to provide discussions about death and dying that are not so widely accepted in other places and contexts.

I would like to ask that those who are wanting to overthrow PGM to identify themselves (at least to me), so that we can talk and try to understand what is happening. I am available for this conversation and I do not intend to harm anyone.

Thanks for your attention.

Hugs<sup>138</sup>,  
Andréia

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<sup>137</sup> As the term 'moderation' is still used by PGM members on Facebook, despite its official nomenclature on Facebook being 'administration', I decided to stick when it in order to make my message clearer.

<sup>138</sup> It is very common for Brazilians to sign off their messages with 'hugs'.

My message (Figure 34) was well received and endorsed by other PGM members, as shown by the more than 1,000 likes and almost 300 comments. Shortly after posting this, I received several private messages on my profile, suggesting plans of action and clues as to what was exactly happening. Soon after, a member of the dissident group got in touch with me, also via private message. In the messages we exchanged, I tried to understand hers/his reasoning behind the attack. According to this member, the idea of attacking PGM surfaced after several people were “unjustly expelled” because of “political indispositions”, according to their own words. After this exchange, I asked them to consider PGM as a whole and its 12 years of existence, we came to a consensus and the attacks stopped<sup>139</sup>.

During the attack, my roles of administrator and group member were prevalent. But, with the problem’s persistence, I found myself uncertain about my role as a researcher. As a member and an administrator, I wanted to help PGM; theoretically, I had two options: wait for another administrator to solve the problem or to passively wait for the problem to go away. In either case, PGM could have ceased to exist, and this could have happened via Facebook’s administration itself or via desertion from other members, since membership numbers kept on decreasing.

In either scenario, I would lose my netnographic field without concluding my data collection, which would compromise my research as a whole. However, this was not the reason why I chose to interfere. My interference was a result of my role as an administrator in the first place, and secondly as a member. In resolving this conflict, I concluded that there was no space for me to behave solely as a researcher.

With the privacy settings that were adopted during the attack, the number of members and membership requests were considerably reduced. I do not mean that PGM was saved because of my intervention, but it is possible that, without it, the attacks would have continued for a longer period of time, making the administration team’s work even more difficult and injuring the group’s development even further.

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<sup>139</sup> The ‘attacker’ and I agreed that her/his message would remain private, so it will not be featured in this work.

### **2.2.2 2<sup>nd</sup> Case: PGM and the Theme of Suicide**

Suicide is a common theme on PGM, as discussed in the previous chapter, and suicide cases are very popular amongst PGM members. Consequently, these tend to receive a lot of comments, which were separated into four categories:

- 1) empathic comments;
- 2) empathic comments with stories of members who lost family and friends to suicide;
- 3) unfriendly comments from members who condemn suicide, and
- 4) comments from members who attempted or are still thinking about attempting suicide.

This classification was made not only from the analysis of comments made in relevant posts on PGM, but also from comments made by the members on the questionnaire which is going to be analysed later in this chapter.

Therefore, the administrative team tries to be alert, because comments about suicide can easily turn into extensive discussions, and there were several instances where members started sharing tips on how to successfully kill oneself. Whenever this happens, admins interfere, letting members know that PGM is not the place for such behaviour; however, admins do not possess a formal education to offer counselling.

The best they can do is point out directions for those who are willing to seek help. This is because the administrative team is composed of people who are interested in the subject of death and that, in some cases, have already developed academic research on the theme in various areas of knowledge. Therefore, there is not a psychological preparation, so to speak, to deal with members who are thinking about suicide. Admins generally act on the basis of good-sense, and this type of preparation is a theme which has not been debated yet, especially because admins are all volunteers, that is: they dedicate part of their free time to keep PGM up and running (Martins, 2017).

Discussions about the reasons why one attempts suicide are tolerated inside PGM because admins understand the group to be a safe environment for such debates, which are generally more difficult to hold offline, also according to

some answers from the aforementioned questionnaire, to be analysed further on. Some members affirm that, in many cases, friends and family refuse to discuss issues related to death, and they are also criticised when they learned about PGM. If, on PGM, where these discussions are allowed and encouraged, they somehow derail by sharing tips or suggesting any dangerous behaviour, those involved are removed from the group.

Because of the reasons previously addressed, since February 2016 all PGM posts need to be revised and approved by an administrator in order to become visible to the group. Therefore, for the first time after this measure was adopted, a post in the 'approval queue' was composed solely of the following question: "How can I kill myself in a quick and painless way?" (Figure 35).

I was the first one to access this post, on a Monday night<sup>140</sup>. At first, I did not know what to do, mostly because, in Brazil, that was still early in the evening<sup>141</sup>, which meant that other admins were probably still working, studying or commuting, perhaps unable to give this case the attention it needed, even if they used mobile devices.

Therefore, I had to think about the situation. I had two options: the first one, as an administrator, in which the standard procedure before the previously mentioned attack, would be to just delete the post, because it would have been immediately available to the group. But since PGM's posts were now revised, there had been no debate on how to act in such occasions. There was no new action protocol.

In the second option, I would have to act not just as member, researcher or administrator on PGM, but as an individual. Therefore, my option was to get in touch with the author of the post and somehow try to help them, acting according to my personal ethos. In none of the situations I should act only in accordance with the roles I had been developing in the group, because they would call for a passive attitude, a positioning I judged unfit when someone's life was potentially in danger.

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<sup>140</sup> 22h27 BST, 13th of June 2016.

<sup>141</sup> 18h27, Brasília time.



orta

Andréia Home 3

**Profiles de Gente Morta**  
[www.pgmsite.com.br](http://www.pgmsite.com.br)  
 contato@pgmsite.com.br

**Profiles de Gente Morta**  
 Secret group

Para pesquisar, clique na lupa

Joined Notifications

Discussion Members Events Photos Files

Search this group

**Pending Posts** 3

Member Requests

Reported to Admin

Reported to Facebook

Group Information

**Pending Posts**

1 min

Como me matar de uma forma que seja rápida sem mt sofrimento ?

Like

Figure 35 - A PGM member asks for tips on suicide (30.11.2016)

That's why I decided to act as an individual, and all this internal conflict took place in a matter of minutes, when I finally sent a private message to the author of the suicide post. I included a link to a Brazilian institution that specialises in helping people with suicidal thoughts, the *Centro de Valorização da Vida* (CVV). My message was (Figure 36):

Hello. I am a PGM moderator and I just saw your post. Posts need to be approved by us before being published in the group. I will not approve your post nor give you tips, but I want to ask you to call CVV, they are qualified to talk about these matters. Their phone number is 141. This is their website:  
<http://www.cvv.org.br>

I hope you get well. A hug.

As I was writing my message, I also considered the possible personal impact this interference could have on me, if I offered myself to talk about this person's problems instead of asking them to call CVV. I decided to refer them to CVV, and that is why my message might seem a little dry, but I wanted them to try and get help from a qualified person. I never got a reply, so I do not know if the author of the post really reached out for help. What I know is that, from time to time, I revisit their profile just to check if it is still active. As we are not Facebook friends, my access to their profile is limited. Still, when I have to approve a new post into the group, I think of her and if this post I am about to approve contains the link to her profile. This questioning blurs the limits of the research field for me, just as my roles as member, researcher, administrator and, of course, an individual (Martins, 2017).

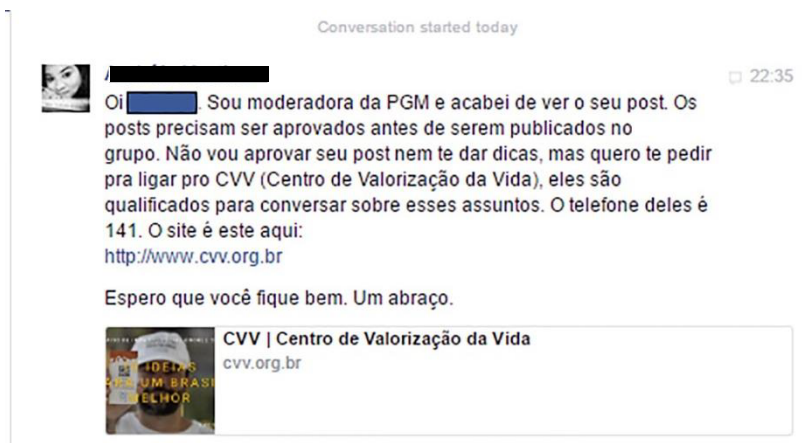


Figure 36 - Private message to a PGM member who was potentially contemplating suicide (30.11.2016)

## 2.3 Inside the Profiles de Gente Morta Group

As previously mentioned, the way a Facebook group is structured is different from an Orkut community. It offers much more information on the group itself, in addition to sections that can be considered similar on both platforms, like viewing the number of members and uploads of pictures and videos, for instance. This section is going to be concentrated on what is not only different, but also relevant for understanding how the group now functions.

These relevant differences were included very recently, in October 2017, when Facebook introduced new tools for better administrating groups. They are known as 'Group Insights' and 'Manage Group' tabs. They relate to historical administrative activity and member engagement data and can only be accessed by the group's owner and/or administrators. The 'Group Insights' tab offers information on how many members were admitted to or left the group, or how many members were approved, declined or blocked during a specific timeframe. Data can be displayed from October 2017 onwards. It is also possible to see if there are any pending membership requests that need to be reviewed by the administration team.

Data in this section also pertain to the number of posts, comments and reactions made in the group within a specific timeframe, and the numbers on most active members; that is, the number of members who "viewed, posted, commented on or reacted to group content", as described by Facebook. In addition, "the average number of times per day that members post, comment and react", according to Facebook, is also displayed in this section, along with the "average number of times per hour that members post, comment or react" to the content available on the group, again according to a definition given by Facebook.

A list with the group's 'Top Posts' is also given, a selection of ten posts with the highest numbers of views, comments or reactions. There is also information on PGM's 'Top Contributors'; that is, "members who have posted and commented the most. Admins are not included", according to Facebook's definition. A graph on age and gender shows data from members who chose "female, male or custom gender for their Facebook profile". According to this, 65.6% of PGM members are female, 34.2% are male and 0.2% have identified themselves with a custom gender option on their Facebook profile.

Two lists: 'Top Countries' and 'Top Cities', show countries and cities, respectively, from which PGM members are accessing the group. Brazil, United States and Portugal are the top three on the list of countries. This is in conformity with a 2010 census from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), which points out that the countries with the biggest number of Brazilians are exactly United States, with 23.8% and Portugal, with 13.4% of almost 500,000 Brazilians who responded to the census. This number is different from the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs' estimative, which revealed around 2.5 million Brazilians living abroad in 2010 (MRE, 2011).

On the list on cities, São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Curitiba are at the top<sup>142</sup>, also in accordance with IBGE data referred to in the previous chapter, when debating the distribution of Orkut-PGM members amongst different Brazilian regions.

The 'Manage Group' tab offers other types of information on the group's activity, divided into seven sections. The first refers to administrative activity, listing the latest actions undertaken by them. 'Pending Posts' show posts that need to be reviewed by the administrators. This section only appears in groups which have decided to adopt this feature, as PGM did, in 2016, as a measure for controlling the attacks suffered by the group, as previously explored.

Then, 'Scheduled Posts', for posts which can be programmed to be posted on a particular date or time; 'Member Requests', which displays membership requests that have not yet been reviewed by the administrators, and 'Reported to Admin', which are problematic posts, flagged by PGM members so administrators can do something about them. These reported posts normally relate to PGM's rules being broken, and disrespect is the most common issue.

Posts which were reported to Facebook are shown in the following section, named 'Reported to Facebook'. In it, it is possible to see which posts were reported directly to Facebook and their reply to the report. If a post is deemed unfit by Facebook's administration, they can remove it, as previously mentioned.

The last section is 'Request Notifications', where administrators can choose if they want to get notifications pertaining PGM on their Facebook profiles, or if

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<sup>142</sup> However, Facebook clarifies that when using São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro on this list, they are referring to the states rather than the cities (the capital city of the state of São Paulo is named São Paulo, and the capital city of the state of Rio de Janeiro is named Rio de Janeiro, which sometimes cause some confusion).

they prefer to “only see requests to join when visiting the group”. The last option requires administrators to keep on visiting PGM to see notifications of their own volition, instead of doing so when notified by Facebook. These options were not available on Orkut and can contribute to admin participation being more effective and immediate.

## 2.4 An Overview of PGM’s Members

For the overview on Orkut-PGM members, data pertained to ten polls and a post entitled “Interview with Members”, in which members answered nine questions related to the community and their view on it. For this overview on Facebook-PGM members, data was retrieved from a questionnaire. The questionnaire was made available to the group between December 2015<sup>143</sup> and January 2016, gathering answers from 274 members<sup>144</sup>.

At that time, PGM had almost 16.500 members in total<sup>145</sup>. The decision to close the questionnaire was taken after the post which advertised it to the group was removed from the top of the group’s discussion forum<sup>146147</sup>, in order to place information on a new rule created by the administrative team. This contributed to the decrease in the influx of responses, and the last one was given five days<sup>148</sup> after the post was removed from its fixed position. After 16 days without new responses and 69 days<sup>149</sup> after its creation, the questionnaire was closed in order to start the analysis phase.

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<sup>143</sup> On 04.12.2015. The reason for choosing this date is that the holiday season would mean members had more free time to answer the questionnaire.

<sup>144</sup> Google does offer options to ensure questionnaires are answered only once by the same person, by asking them to provide their email address prior to accessing the questions. However, this option was not chosen because PGM members tend to be concerned about their privacy. Because of this, they would probably be put off from answering the questionnaire if they had to provide their email address in order to answer it. In addition, only someone who really wanted to ‘mess up’ with data collection would answer 25 questions twice, so it is possible that they are all genuine and from different members.

<sup>145</sup> 16.478 in 11.02.2016.

<sup>146</sup> A post can be “pinned” on the top of a Facebook group’s discussion forum in order to make it always visible for its members. Otherwise, posts are organised either chronologically, from the date they were created, with the latest ones on top, or according to the date the last comment was made. Posts which do not receive continuous attention, with new comments, tend to be moved to the “bottom” of the discussion forum and can only be found if directly searched for, or if one keeps scrolling down within the discussion forum.

<sup>147</sup> On 21.01.2016.

<sup>148</sup> 26.01.2016.

<sup>149</sup> On 11.02.2016, at 15h09.

The questionnaire was constructed with Google Forms, externally to Facebook. This tool allowed different types of questions to be placed together, requiring either discursive or multiple-choice answers, a way of mixing the types of questions found in the previously analysed polls and “Interview”. This questionnaire was comprised of 25 questions, which were elaborated to fill gaps in the data analysed in the previous chapter<sup>150</sup>, and to try and make the questions clearer as to what kind of information was needed from the responders. The questions were:

1. What is your gender?
2. How old are you?
3. In which state do you live?
4. How long have you participated in PGM?
5. How did you discover the group?
6. For what reasons did you decide to participate in PGM?
7. Are there specific kinds of death that catch your attention?
8. How would you describe your participation in PGM?
9. Do your family/friends know that you are a PGM member?
10. If yes, have you received any kind of comment or criticism?
11. With what kind of profile do you use to participate in the PGM group?
12. If your profile is fake, please justify:
13. Do you watch virtual wakes?
14. What are your reasons for watching virtual wakes?
15. How often do you watch virtual wakes?
16. Do your family/friends know you watch virtual wakes?
17. If yes, have you received any kind of comment or criticism?
18. Have you ever watched the virtual wake of someone you know?
19. Have you ever participated in real wakes of strangers?
20. What kind of things do you do while watching a virtual wake?
21. How would you feel if you knew that strangers were watching the virtual wake of a member of your family/friends?
22. For you, what are the main reasons to have a virtual wake?

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<sup>150</sup> Choosing not to pose the exact same questions as the ones analysed in the previous chapter was based on a suspicion that most members were already part of PGM back on Orkut (as the answers to question 4 show) and because some behaviours have changed.

23. Do you consider yourself to be personally interested in death?
24. Do you ever talk about death outside PGM? If so, with whom? If not, why?
25. Do you think that talking about death is a taboo topic in Brazil?

All but nine questions will be analysed in this chapter. The others<sup>151</sup> will be examined in the next, because they deal exclusively with virtual wakes. As in the previous chapter, the questions analysed here are separated in three categories:

- 1) Personal Information: gender, age, place of residence, reasons to become a member, usage of fake profiles and their justifications, and interest in death. Answers to these questions were the easiest ones to quantify;
- 2) On and Offline Behaviour: most interesting causes of death, types of members, if family knows about PGM (and if they have received comments or critiques about it), talking about death offline, and if they see death as taboo in Brazil<sup>152</sup>. Answers in this category were the most difficult ones to quantify, because they are strongly discursive;
- 3) Group Information: length of time of participation, and how did they discover the group.

#### **2.4.1 Personal Information: What is Your Gender?**

Before zeroing in on the results of the first question, it is important to stress that this questionnaire was elaborated before Facebook introduced the aforementioned administrative tools giving specific information on groups. Some of the specific information presented in that section cover themes addressed here, such as age, gender, and place of residency.

However, since gender was not covered on the Orkut-PGM polls, it seemed relevant to know if there was a dominant gender on Facebook-PGM. This was a multiple-choice question, and the options were: 'Female', 'Male' and 'Other'. The 'Other' option allowed respondents to determine how they identified themselves,

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<sup>151</sup> Questions 13 to 22.

<sup>152</sup> Answers to this question can also be interpreted as personal, because it is the members opinion on the matter. But beyond that, it is also their interpretation of the Brazilian behaviour towards death in day-to-day life, so that is why I placed it under this category.



gender-wise. The majority identified as 'Female' (231 votes, 84.3%), while the minority identified as 'Male' (42, 15.3%) and 'Other' (1, 0.4%). The person who ticked the 'Other' option declared to be Non-Binary.

According to a piece of research published in 2015 (PNAD), 51.48% of the Brazilian population is female, and 48,52%, male. This means that there are 6.3 million more females than males in the country (IBGE 2015)<sup>153</sup>, and this difference is visible on PGM as well, though on a smaller scale. In February 2018, a projection indicated that there are almost 209 million Brazilians, and a new one is born every 21 seconds<sup>154</sup>.

#### **2.4.2 Personal Information: How Old Are You?**

Age was also a topic that was not covered in the PGM-Orkut polls, so it was included in the questionnaire. Options were given according to an age-range. The majority declared to be between 16 and 29 years old (150 votes, 54.74%), while the second most voted option was between 30 and 39 years (95 votes, 34.67%). Other options were voted as follows: 40-49 years (22 votes, 8.02%), 50-59 years (6 votes, 2.18%) and 60 years and up (one vote, 0.36%).

#### **2.4.3 Personal Information: In Which State Do You Live?**

This theme was previously analysed but repeating it with Facebook-PGM members seemed relevant to see if states which were under-represented during Orkut times would now have higher numbers. In 2007, when the Orkut-PGM poll was created, private access to the Internet was still a privilege in Brazil, and 79% of the Brazilian population had never even accessed it (Avellar e Duarte, 2007). Subsequently, poorer regions, such as the North and Northeast, were underrepresented back then.

However, almost a decade later, a link between Internet access and distribution within the country is not visible through the analysis of the answers to this question. By the beginning of 2015, mobile phones became the major form of connecting to the Internet in Brazil for users between nine and 17 years of age

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<sup>153</sup> Total numbers from 2015 are 105 million women and 98,5 million men (IBGE).

<sup>154</sup> The website even offers a "real-time" counter, which is updated every 21 seconds. The real number as of 15:34, 15.02.2018 was 208.638.683.00 Brazilians.

(Jansen, 2014), but 43% of the population still did not have access to the Internet (Chade, 2015). Yet, that is a considerable improvement from the 79% in 2007.

In the questionnaire, states from the South and Southeast, the richest and most densely populated regions of Brazil, as addressed in Chapter 4, were still at the top. States with fewer numbers are all from the Northeast and North regions. Granted that the number of members who answered the questionnaire in 2015-16 is considerably smaller than those who answered the poll in 2007<sup>155</sup>, there was still a strong similarity between both sets of data, with the same states appearing as the most voted options.

As aforementioned, the majority of answers from the Facebook-PGM questionnaire indicated that, from the 274 responders, 185 resided in the Southeast region (67.51%). The South Region was represented by 45 answers (16.42%), the Central region, by 19 (6.93%); the Northeast, 18 (6.56%. This region is composed of nine states, but only eight appeared in the questionnaire), and the North, by only one (0.36%). Six answers were from members who claimed to live abroad (2.18%).

#### **2.4.4 Personal Information: For What Reasons Did You Decide to Participate in the PGM group?**

This type of question has previously proven to be tricky, because answers can relate to not only the reasons for choosing to participate in the group in the first place, but also reasons to remain a member. Because of this, it was formulated as a multiple-choice question to make intentions clearer. Options were: 1) 'I'm interested in different subjects'; 2) 'I'm interested in death-related subjects'; 3) 'Curiosity', and 4) 'Morbid Curiosity'.

The Online Collins Dictionary (N/A) defines the word 'morbid' in this manner: "if you describe a person or their interest in something as morbid, you mean that they are very interested in unpleasant things, especially death, and you think this is strange". This is the way PGM members understand the word and its subsequent use when classifying their interest in death-related things. Therefore, it would not be a surprise if they also saw this as something strange, as suggested by the dictionary definition.

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<sup>155</sup> There were 3.016 answers in the 2007 poll, and 274 in the 2015-16 questionnaire.

This differentiation between the two kinds of curiosity was made because this seemed to be a recurrent theme in the group. There have been debates over the normality of being 'naturally curious' about the death of others, and that death is a natural process, common to all of us, while other arguments revolved around taking that curiosity to another level by being interested in particular types of deaths or in gore images, for example. For this reason, even if the use of the expression 'morbidly curious' can be seen as not exactly accurate, it was, however, an expression and a differentiation that made sense to the group.

This differentiation would be then expressed in options 1, 2 and 3; option 1 represents the interest in unusual subjects (with death being one of them); option 2 relates to a stronger interest in death-related topics, and 3, to death being at the very centre of one's interests, that this type of interest becomes an entirely different category, popularly referred to as 'morbidly curious' in Brazil.

Answers were ranked as follows: 'I'm interested in death-related subjects' was the most voted one (131 votes, 47.81%); followed by 'Curiosity' (60 votes, 21.89%), 'Morbid Curiosity' (56 votes, 20.43%) and, lastly, by 'I'm interested in different subjects' (20 votes, 7.29%).

It was also possible to give discursive answers, classified as "Other" (seven answers). The most interesting ones were related to members wanting to remind themselves that life is fleeting, or that they are interested in life stories rather than death, or because they think that, through their participation in the group, they can potentially help someone who is grieving. One person claimed that the reason to become a PGM member was because his/her brother had died, while another claimed it was for the purpose of statistical research.

#### **2.4.5 Personal Information: With What Kind of Profile do You Use to Participate in the PGM group?**

The debate on fake profiles was also important to address in this questionnaire, even though it had been the theme of an Orkut-PGM poll. However, fake profiles seem to still be the minority: only 12 members (4.37%) claimed to use one, while the majority claimed to use their personal, real profiles to participate in the group (257 answers, 93.79%). It was also possible for members to include their own answers, which only two of them did (0.72%). One claimed to use their professional profile, while the other claimed their profile was

“partially fake”, in the sense that it had a real profile picture but it was not under their real name with only a few publications.

In addition, the next question on the questionnaire asked members to provide more information: ‘If your profile is fake, please justify’. Only 12 people, as shown in the previous paragraph, claimed their profile was fake, but there were 15 answers (5.47%) to this question. Once they were analysed, three answers were undetermined, or were from members who did not understand what the question was about and answered that their profile was not fake.

For the 12 other answers, justifications were varied, but they mainly revolved around privacy. One claimed to be ashamed of being a part of PGM, while another said her/his partner does not want she/he to see the “type of things” which are posted on PGM, so she/he has to keep her/his participation a secret. One answer was about the member having a health condition and wanting to be part of groups like PGM, so they do not want anyone to know about their health problems, which are apparent on their real Facebook profile.

Currently, the use of fake profiles on Brazilian social networks, especially Facebook, are no longer strongly linked to individual privacy as they had been in Orkut times. They have been mainly used by Brazilian politicians to influence electors. This type of approach was used to manipulate the popular opinion for the impeachment of the president Dilma Rousseff, in 2017, and for the upcoming 2018 presidential elections. In this context, fake profiles are no longer used by single, independent individuals, but by companies or criminal organisations which employ people to manipulate several profiles at once (Gragnani, 2018), together with the creation of fake news and fake websites to propagate them.

Voting is compulsory in Brazil from the ages of 16 to 60. Not voting is punishable by law, and can have several consequences, ranging from not being able to request a passport to being refused opportunities to work for the government, which is an ideal route for Brazilians nowadays. Working in the public sector requires passing in an extremely competitive, national exam, depending on the post, for which some prepare for years, depending on rank and pay. Normally, governmental jobs are secure and pay very well, so these are the main reasons why they are so sought after nowadays, especially in times of crisis.

The use of fake profiles on Facebook-PGM, however, does not seem to be linked with political purposes and is perhaps still connected to the idea of preserving personal privacy.

#### **2.4.6 Personal Information: Do You Consider Yourself to be Personally Interested in Death?**

This question could be interpreted as being similar to the “For what reasons did you decide to participate in PGM”, analysed previously. But with this particular, seemingly repetitive question, the aim was to understand how PGM members saw themselves in a more black-and-white setting, without classifying their interest through the use of words like ‘morbid’, for example. The majority voted ‘Yes’ (246, 89.78%). ‘No’ received only 28 votes (10.21%).

#### **2.4.7 On and Offline Behaviour: Are There Specific Kinds of Death that Catch Your Attention?**

This question was constructed in a way in which it would be clear that it intended to uncover the type of death that sparked the member’s personal interest, not what they thought was more interesting or common on/to the group. This was a multiple-choice type of question, and the options provided were:

- 1) Murder;
- 2) Suicide;
- 3) Accident;
- 4) Death of Children;
- 5) Death of Women;
- 6) Death of Famous People, and
- 7) Death of Criminals.

‘Suicide’ was, again, at the top of the list (178 votes, 64.96%), but the subject will not be discussed further. The second most voted option was ‘Murder’ (20 votes, 7.29%), followed by ‘Death of Children’ (13 votes, 4.74%), ‘Accident’ (nine votes, 3.28%), and ‘Death of Women’ (four votes, 1.45%). The two last options, ‘Death of Famous People’ and ‘Death of Criminals’ both received three votes each (2.18%).

The 'Death of Criminals' option was included in this questionnaire because, as the Internet has become much more accessible to Brazilian lower classes, people of poorer backgrounds are also present on Facebook, more so than on Orkut. Now, their presence has become more apparent, at least inside PGM, because people from poorer backgrounds in Brazil tend to be more involved in criminal activity. If they die during such activities, their social status and the circumstances of their deaths are immediately exposed inside PGM. Consequently, it is very common to see, on PGM, profiles of people who were murdered by the police while committing crimes, or while confronting the police in gang and drug related situations, or people who were executed by gang rivals.

Since gang behaviour is extremely linked to unlawful and violent behaviours, this is also directly linked to poverty in Brazil. Therefore, as more and more profiles started to appear on PGM, belonging to someone whose cause of death was specified as "died while robbing a bank", or "executed by rival gang members", for example, the new 'slang', mentioned in the Facebook-PGM rules previously, BBBM, was created. As superficially explained in the beginning of this chapter, BBBM means 'a good criminal is a dead criminal', and this is used in PGM exclusively in these types of deaths. With these deaths becoming more popular, another slang appeared: JFT, meaning *Já foi tarde*, a Brazilian expression that is difficult to translate, but is used to say someone's death should have happened earlier and they will not be missed.

Figure 37 shows these acronyms being used. The profile was presented on PGM as being from a man who was killed by the police after running over a naval officer during a military blockade. In the link to a journalistic report confirming his death, there is no indication that the deceased was involved in any criminal activity, but value judgements from PGM members pointed towards it.

Despite a member commenting 'DEP', the other two use BBBM and JFT, together with "minus one", in the sense of 'one less criminal' to worry about<sup>156</sup>. These comments were made based on the information retrieved from the deceased's profile, which, amongst other things, showed him smoking marijuana, which is illegal in Brazil. This alone, however, is not enough to classify someone as a criminal.

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<sup>156</sup> The 'minus one' and BBBM comments are from the same member.

Facebook interface showing a post titled "Profiles de Gente Morta" in the search bar. The post is from a user in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, posted 25 minutes ago. The text of the post reads: "+ [redacted] + morto a tiro após atropelar soldado da marinha" followed by two URLs: "https://www.facebook.com/felipe.tcp?fref=ts" and "noticia:http://g1.globo.com/.../jovem-morre-apos-ser-baleado-por-mili...". Below the text is a blurred image of a person. The user's profile picture is also blurred, and their bio states "Works at Moto taxi". There is an "Add Friend" button. Below the post are "Like" and "Comment" buttons. A section titled "View 13 more comments" shows several replies, including "DEP", "-1", "BBBM", and "JFT!!!", each with a "Like" and "Reply" option and a timestamp.

Figure 37 - A post showing the use of 'BBBM' and 'JFT' (12.09.2015)

In addition to the seven options provided for answering this question, responders created two other categories of their own: “All and any deaths” (three votes, 1.09%) and “Unresolved or Mysterious deaths” (two votes, 0.7%). Also, there were two answers that ended up being in their own categories: “Tragic deaths” (one vote, 0.36%) and “Deaths by silly reasons” (one vote, 0.36%), which one can only speculate what it means. Examples of silly deaths which were deemed so by PGM members would be suffering a fatal accident while trying to take a selfie or film a video, or someone dying as a result of something apparently harmless.

#### **2.4.8 On and Offline Behaviour: How Would You Describe Your Participation in the PGM group?**

The intent of this question was for members to classify their behaviour in the group. Four possible answers were provided for voting, according to their activities:

- a) Observer: a member who visits profiles, reads articles and reports related to certain deaths, watches virtual wakes but does not make comments;
- b) Commentator: a member who leaves at least a R.I.P. as a comment on topics featuring profiles of deceased Facebook users, and participates in some discussions in the group;
- c) Active: a member who participates in all previous forms and others, and
- d) Moderator.

‘Observers’ were the most common type, with 187 answers in total (68.24%). From these, six claimed to be observers who made comments very rarely, or to fall between this category and the next. But because they claimed to be observers more than anything, they were classified as such. ‘Commentators’ was the second most popular option, with 63 answers (22.99%), followed by members who considered themselves to be ‘Active’ (21 answers, 7.66%). There were three (1.09%) who declared to be members of the moderation team.



#### **2.4.9 On and Offline Behaviour: Do Your Family and Friends Know You Are a PGM Member?**

There were only two options for answering this question: 'Yes' and 'No'. Results were pretty tight: 148 of them said 'Yes' (54.01%), while 126 said 'No' (45.98%), a difference of less than 10% between them. This question was kept as straightforward as possible because the next one, to be analysed now, complements this one. It asks: "If yes, have you ever heard any kind of comment or critique?". But for this question there were only 116 valid answers.

From them, 28 members (24.13%) simply stated 'No' to having ever heard comments or critiques. One claimed to even show the group's content to her/his mother. Furthermore, 88 answers (75.86%) had to be divided into six categories, depending on how other people interpreted their participation on PGM. Some of these answers were quite lengthy, so the same system used in the previous chapter was adopted: answers were classified according to the first adjective defining their experience.

This was done because many members used different adjectives which could place their answer in more than one category. For example, some used "crazy" and "morbid" in the same sentence, so their answer was placed under the "crazy" category. However, if after going through the full answer, the context favoured one adjective over the other, answers were classified in accordance to that adjective instead.

Therefore, according to this classification, friends/family of PGM members think their participation in the group is:

- 1) Crazy, sick, repulsive (32 answers, 36.36%);
- 2) Morbid, unhealthy, something they shouldn't do (22 answers, 25%);
- 3) Strange, incomprehensible (17 answers, 19.31%);
- 4) Horrible, sad (four answers, 4.54%);
- 5) Interesting (two answers, 2.27%), and
- 6) Surprising (two answers, 2.27%).

In addition, some replied 'Yes', but did not give further information on comments or critiques they had heard (eight answers, 9.09%). There was one answer with no comment (0.86%).

It is important to point out that the majority of answers in category one was related to PGM membership being a sign of madness or craziness, more than it being something sick or repulsive. In addition, almost all answers which had the word “crazy” (or similar) in them, were written in the feminine form, in Portuguese. This shows that these adjectives were used more often with female PGM members.

The second category is comprised of answers which had Portuguese expressions on the participation on PGM “not doing any good”, or “making one feel bad”, rather than the word unhealthy. But these expressions relate to talking about death as being something dangerous, unlucky, which would attract bad energies, bad thoughts or death itself.

This is an example of how some Brazilians think that talking about death can be interpreted as a way to summon it, and they do not like it. This way of thinking is similar to the 19<sup>th</sup> century funeral etiquette, discussed on Chapter 3, and some of the things that should be done or avoided, during a funeral, in order to not attract death and misfortune.

#### **2.4.10 On and Offline Behaviour: Do You Ever Talk About Death Outside of PGM? If So, with Whom? If Not, Why?**

It was already established that PGM is an online space for debating death and dying. With this question, the aim was to find out if members talked about it offline, outside of the group, and with whom. Only 129 respondents answered this question, which was discursive, so they were responsible for entering their own statements. For analytical purposes, they were separated into six categories:

- 1) No, without providing reasons for not doing it;
- 2) No, providing reasons for not doing it;
- 3) Yes, providing reasons for doing it, but not a specific type of person;
- 4) Yes, without providing reasons for doing it;
- 5) With spouse, family, partners, and
- 6) With friends or colleagues.

The most voted category, or types of person with whom PGM members like to talk about death, is the one composed of friends and colleagues (40 answers,

31%). Many included mentions to family members as well and some claimed to talk about death with their therapists.

Those who said 'No', without providing further information on their reasons not to talk about death offline, amounted to 27 (20.93%), including one member who claimed to think about it a lot, despite never talking about it.

Another 23 people answered 'No' (17.82%) but did provide a reason for not talking about death outside PGM. Their justifications revolved around other people not being interested in the subject or not understanding their interest, being prejudiced or finding it morbid. Individually, some claimed being very private about it, or that they and other people feel uncomfortable talking about it, and that some are even afraid to discuss it. And, finally, there were some mentions to death still being taboo in Brazil, a topic which will be addressed in the next question.

Spouses, family and partners were mentioned in 19 answers (14.72%). Some stated finding important to talk about death with their loved ones after they became parents, or after a serious health issue, while others mentioned religion, mostly Spiritism, which is based on the premise of reincarnation, as the main reason behind the behaviour.

18 answers (13.95%) were positive regarding talking about death but did not specify exactly to whom. Many said they talk about it with any and every person because they find the subject interesting, or because they work either with death or in the healthcare system. Finally, there was one person who simply answered 'Yes' (0.77%), and one undetermined answer (0.77%).

#### **2.4.11 On and Offline Behaviour: Do You Think Talking About Death Is Taboo in Brazil?**

Again, this was an open question which required discursive answers. Only 148 responders answered it. They have been divided into four categories:

- 1) Yes, and reasons why;
- 2) No, and reasons why;
- 3) Undetermined, and
- 4) Don't know.

According to 99 members (66.89%), death indeed is taboo in Brazil. From these, 56 (56.56%) provided reasons why they believe that. Fear was a very commonly used term, and there were mentions that people are just not used to debating it, therefore they see it as taboo. Hypocrisy, in the sense they are interested in the theme, but do not want to talk openly about it, was also brought up. Some also claimed people are bothered by discussions around death and that it is a human taboo overall, present everywhere, not only in Brazil. Also, justifications revolved around the superstitious aspect of it, mentioned previously, and thinking that it is bad to talk about death, for it can attract death itself or bad energies. Some stressed that suicide is tabooer than death itself.

In the category where people claimed death was not a taboo in Brazil (42 answers, 28.37%), only nine (21.42%) provided their interpretations for it. Many think the taboo lies mainly with suicide or subjects like euthanasia and abortion, which are prohibited in the country, rather than with death as a whole. Others think talking about death is just normal, or that people are afraid, but there is no taboo. Fear was also mentioned, but that it was not enough to classify death as taboo. There were five undetermined answers (3.37%), and two members answered, 'I don't know' (1.35%).

#### **2.4.12 Community Information: How Long Have You Been a Member of PGM?**

The first question in this category was related to the length of participation on PGM, and it aimed to quantify how many members belonged to Orkut-PGM and migrated to Facebook. There were five options for voting:

- 1) Days;
- 2) Weeks;
- 3) Months;
- 4) Years, and
- 5) Since Orkut.

The most voted option was exactly the one which mentioned Orkut (152 answers, 55.47%). Then, 'Months' received 64 answers (23.35%), and 'Years' was the following one (45 answers, 16.42%). This category could technically contain answers from those who were participating in PGM during Orkut times as

well, though it is impossible to determine how many. 'Weeks' received seven answers (2.55%), and 'Days', six (2.18%).

#### **2.4.13 Group Information: How Did You Discover the Group?**

Closing this category and the analysis of the questionnaire in this chapter, PGM members were asked how they found out about the group. Options were:

- 1) Through friends or family;
- 2) Sites or Blogs;
- 3) Articles from Newspapers or Magazines, and
- 4) By myself.

'By myself' was the most popular one, with 195 votes (71.16%). 'Friends and family' received 50 votes (18.24%), 'Sites or Blogs', 18 (6.56%), and 'Articles from newspapers or magazines' had only four votes (1.45%). Some members included their own answers.

The most interesting one was from someone who had the link to her/his Orkut profile posted on Orkut-PGM as if she/he was dead; then, PGM had less than 1,000 members. Three claimed they found out about it through a comment on another Facebook group, while one said it appeared to her/him as a suggestion from Facebook itself. Another said they accompanied it since Orkut, and the last one said they did not remember how they discovered PGM at all.

### **3 Summary**

A brief history of Facebook, and its establishment in Brazil were the first themes of this chapter. PGM's transition to the new social network was also covered, while highlighting changes which occurred during this transition. The development of different roles (member, researcher, moderator/administrator) inside PGM was also covered, narrating two situations in which these different roles were conflicting.

It granted access to PGM's backstage, explaining some of the features that are only available to the group's owner or administrators. An overview on PGM members was constructed with information retrieved from a questionnaire, responded to by 274 members. Answers have shown that the majority of respondents are females, between 16 and 29 years old, living in the Southeast

region of Brazil. They have been PGM members for years, having discovered the group by themselves, and their reasons for joining the group are related to an interest in death-related subjects. However, they do not consider themselves to be personally interested in death.

Access to the group is done through their 'real' profiles: that is, the same ones used to interact with other Facebook users outside PGM and they consider themselves to be observers inside PGM. Suicide is the type of death that is considered to be the most interesting to them.

The majority claimed that their family and friends are aware of their membership to PGM, and that they have received criticisms and comments about it. Those criticisms and comments mainly revolved around family and friends thinking that their membership to PGM was something they considered to be crazy, sick or repulsive. Those who talk about death outside of PGM, generally do so with their friends and colleagues, and they believe death is taboo in Brazil.

This 'taboo', however, will continue to be addressed in the next chapter, which will focus on the virtual wakes, and offers the final considerations for this work.

## Chapter 6: The Virtual Wake in Brazil

After explaining what funerals are in Brazil (Chapter 1) and providing a historical context to them (Chapter 3), with emphasis on wakes, this thesis has addressed the way Internet has been used in the country with death-related purposes, the creation of the *Profiles de Gente Morta* as an Orkut community (Chapter 4), its move to Facebook (Chapter 5), along with a general profile of its members on both platforms.

These were steps leading towards this final chapter, a structure which aimed to provide a better understanding of the Brazilian context in order to discuss what virtual wakes are in Brazil. Therefore, the final instalment of this thesis deals directly with virtual wakes and their establishment in Brazil, along with thoughts and opinions from PGM users on the subject. Because of this, there are two sets of data presented here; the first is comprised of a poll which was made available to Orkut-PGM members. The second set is related to specific questions from the questionnaire presented to the Facebook-PGM group, in 2015-2016.

Since the whole theme of virtual wakes has not been sufficiently explored in Brazilian Academia, there is no literature or official data to compare to or sustain the findings presented here, only the findings themselves. However, a link between this data and official numbers is established whenever possible.

This chapter starts with a more detailed explanation of what virtual wakes are, highlighting the main reasons why they are possible in, and perhaps unique to Brazil. Data analysis is the last portion, focused on answering the research questions presented at the Introduction to this thesis:

- 1) What are the reasons for PGM members to watch virtual wakes of strangers?
- 2) Is the discussion of death-related issues in the PGM group enabling an offline re-approximation with death in urban Brazil?
- 3) Is it possible to interpret PGM members' behaviour as a reconstruction or a reconfiguration of the 19th century behaviour towards death in Brazil?

These are followed by the final considerations for this work.

## 1 What Are Virtual Wakes, Exactly?

An introduction to the reasons why *velórios virtuais* were translated to English as virtual wakes, as opposed to the terminology already existing in the US, was presented in the first chapter of this thesis. This section offers a further discussion on what virtual wakes are, how they were created and what are their purposes, according to the two most popular funerary companies whose virtual wakes are viewed by PGM members.

Like rituals of life (birth, marriage, graduation), rituals of death are also present in virtuality. Visiting a cemetery, for instance, is possible through virtual tours like the one by *Père-Lachaise*, the largest cemetery in Paris<sup>157</sup>. In the virtual tour, it is possible to locate and view several graves in detail. Websites like 'Find a Grave'<sup>158</sup> serve as a tool to locate the place of burial of regular people, as well as celebrities, with the possibility to leave virtual messages, virtual candles and virtual flowers. Cemetery enthusiasts are keen on both tools, which allow them to pay respects in a very real, offline way.

When it comes to death in Brazil, the use of virtual tools for an offline, practical purpose is a bit different, as explained in previous chapters. Blogs and sites dedicated to compiling images of victims of accidents and violence, exist under the guise of education and awareness to the dangers of reckless driving and involvement with organised crime. However, the most peculiar tool has not been discussed yet. It is the virtual wake, which is a real-time, online broadcasting of an actual wake, a ritual extremely important for Brazilians of almost every faith, as also addressed in Chapter 1.

Since the perception of death and the dead started to change in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the prohibition of church burials and the institution of cemeteries as the only place of for interment, Brazilians were left with fewer means to keep their deceased loved ones close to them. One suspicion is that the wake is one of these means, a prolonged ritual of separation, in which those left behind prepare to be definitely separated from their loved ones not just through the finality of death, but also geographically.

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<sup>157</sup> Available at [www.pere-lachaise.com](http://www.pere-lachaise.com). Accessed 12.12.2017.

<sup>158</sup> Available at [www.findagrave.com](http://www.findagrave.com). Accessed 12.12.2017.



However, sometimes it is not possible for some to attend a wake. Reasons revolve around the country's continental proportions, migration, and the fact that wakes are organised as soon as possible after death, as presented in Chapter 1. All of these factors can contribute to making it difficult for some to get out of work or to arrange travelling in such a short notice.

With that problem in mind, a Brazilian funerary company called *Grupo Vila* created, in 2001, the virtual wake service as an alternative. Because of its claim of being the pioneer in Brazil, and because it is one of the two funerary companies that were first listed on Orkut-PGM, *Grupo Vila* is one of the two companies which will illustrate, in this chapter, how the virtual wake works in Brazil.

By installing cameras on wake rooms and connecting them to the Internet, *Grupo Vila* made it possible for mourners to accompany wakes from a computer, making one virtually present without having to leave home or to worry about travel and work arrangements. On its website, *Grupo Vila* describe the service as:

#### Pioneering in the care for bereaved relatives

The Virtual Wake is a way to reduce the distance between family and friends who for some reason are far away and cannot accompany the wake *in loco*.

Created to serve those who want to share the farewell of a loved one, the Webcam service offered by Grupo Vila, since 2001, is a pioneer in Brazil.

At family request, the service will be made available and the images of the wake will be transmitted through our portal, through a locally installed camera, allowing the wake to be accompanied at a distance. To give more security and convenience to the customer, the service has restricted access, requiring a password, used by authorised family and friends.

You can also send electronic messages that will be delivered to family members at the wake.

The virtual wake currently transmits images of wakes held in the central chapel of the Wake Centre São José in Natal, in the central chapel of the *Morada da Paz* Funeral Home in João Pessoa, and in the central chapel of the *Morada Parque da Paz* Cemetery in Recife.

#### How it works

To follow the virtual wake, go to our online obituary and click on the name of your loved one (Grupo Vila, n.d.)

In this description, *Grupo Vila* indicates that the system is intended for family and friends of the deceased who are unable to personally attend the wake. It is

also indicated that the service has been offered since 2001, and that the resource is provided upon request. Next, *Grupo Vila* indicates that, for security and convenience reasons, the broadcast has restricted access, and that it is possible to send messages which will be delivered to the deceased's family during the wake. Then, it lists the places where virtual wakes are offered, all of them capital cities from states in the Northeast of Brazil.

This is interesting because during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many Northeasterners fled the impoverished, dry region to seek work in the Southeast. This is known in Brazil as the Rural Exodus and is a result of the mechanisation of agriculture (Fonseca et al., 2015). In 1970, 30% of the rural population migrated, seeking a better life. This migration contributed to the urbanisation of Brazil: between 1950 and 1960, it was responsible for 17.4% of the population growth in South-eastern cities (Alves et al, 2011).

However, virtual wakes are not only offered by funerary companies based in the Northeast region of Brazil, but it is interesting that *Grupo Vila*, being the self-proclaimed pioneer in offering this service in the country, is a company based in the Northeast. This could perhaps signal that the initial intention of virtual wakes was to benefit families who have been divided after migrating to other regions, as still happens today.

Lastly, the description informs readers that, in order to view virtual wakes, it is necessary to access the obituaries page, for which a link is provided. On the obituaries page<sup>159</sup>, there is a list, organised alphabetically, with full names, dates of birth and death, time, venue and duration of the wake, and time, date and venue of the place of disposal (burial being the most common) for each individual admitted to one of *Grupo Vila's* Wake Centres. In each individual's details slot, there are also buttons for sharing that information on two social network sites: Twitter and Facebook, as shown in Figure 38, which also shows that the first individual on the list was having a virtual wake (the top, dark green button with a camera icon indicates that). Figure 39 is a screenshot of one of the group's cameras, showing a virtual wake held on the premises in the city of João Pessoa.

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<sup>159</sup> Available at <https://bit.ly/2HUWhQ2>. Accessed 22.05.2016.



Figure 388 - Grupo Vila's obituary page, showcasing information about wakes and burials (22.05.2016)



Figure 399 – Still from a Grupo Villa virtual wake (24.05.2016)

The other company whose virtual wakes are accessed by PGM members is called *Urbam*, owned by the city of São José dos Campos, São Paulo. Since it is a public funerary company, the virtual wakes are offered free of charge. This is the information contained on the website:

In this section you can watch the wake of a loved one on the Internet.

The virtual wake is a service offered by Urbam to families who use any of the four funeral rooms in the Funeral Complex of São José dos Campos. This is a modern and innovative resource through which families can make use of technology to break the barrier of physical distance, allowing those who are far away to share the moment of farewell to their loved one.

From a camera connected to the URBAM website, images of the wake are displayed in real time. It is also possible to send condolence messages to the family via the email link.

The virtual wake service is only liberated when the family authorises its transmission with the funerary administration.

How to use:

To view the wake in real time, click on the camera symbol corresponding to the desired room.

If you are prompted to install the camera plugin, you must accept the installation to view the image on your computer.

There are no wakes at the moment (Urbam, n.d.).

Urbam (Figure 40) also focuses on the practicality of virtual wakes for family and friends of the deceased, “breaking the barrier of physical distance”. After technical tips, they make it visible on that page if there are any virtual wakes happening at the moment<sup>160</sup>. In a similar way to *Grupo Vila*, which did not mention the cost of hiring a virtual wake, *Urbam* does not make it clear that there are not any fees deriving from their service.

To learn about this, it is necessary to visit another section of *Urbam*’s website<sup>161</sup>, where there’s a list of all the services provided. Virtual wakes are the last, and only then it is clear that “this service is a free resource offered to those with family members and friends who live far away and are not able to arrive on time for the funeral”. Neither company mentions the use of the virtual wake as a means to allow the participation of those who have restricted mobility issues, but it certainly is a good reason for it to be hired.

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<sup>160</sup> When I collected their description, on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of February 2018, there were not any.

<sup>161</sup> Available at <https://bit.ly/2K9HjWP>. Accessed 22.02.2018.

From the descriptions provided by these two companies, it seems like virtual wakes are either private and paid, or private and free of charge. This is not true. Actually, virtual wakes can be paid and public, and free and public as well. In all cases, the deceased's family must either hire the service and/or allow its transmission. In public (or open) virtual wakes, anyone who accesses the funerary company's website can watch them. But this is something that these two funerary companies do not mention in their websites either. Perhaps they privately inform mourners of this possibility when they choose it as an open access broadcast<sup>162</sup>.

Subsequently, since the advent of virtual wakes, having any kind of relationship to the deceased or their family is no longer needed in order to participate in a wake (as long as it is being transmitted online). This is quite contrary to the predominance of privacy established in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as briefly explained in Chapter 4, when wakes were undoubtedly established as private affairs in Brazilian metropolises.

The possibility of undetectable participation inaugurated by virtual wakes enables a behaviour which is much closer to the one predominant in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, before the reformations that changed the way death was seen, treated and understood in Brazil, as mentioned in Chapter 3. Back then, any and everyone was welcome to the funerals. Actually, the more participants, the better. If, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, participating in the funeral of a "stranger" was a matter of social and religious duty, now there are few clues to suggest the same undertone for those watching virtual wakes. However, there is no social obligation to be fulfilled, no invitation and no interaction with those who are actually there.

Perhaps there is still a link with acknowledging, even if just to oneself, the loss of a fellow human, but the service, when public, works in favour of keeping the watchers as anonymous individuals, whose presence is, most of the time, unknown to those who are actually present at the wake, because all they see is a camera. This is, perhaps, one of the reasons why the concept of virtual wakes is so connected with the idea of curiosity, as expressed by the members of the Dead People Profiles group in the data analysed further along this chapter.

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<sup>162</sup> As explained in the Methodology chapter, those funerary companies were contacted about their *modus operandi*, but they never answered.

In addition, there is no risk of exposure to the watchers and, therefore, no value judgements can be issued towards them. The opposite happens with those who physically participate in wakes of strangers in Brazil: they are not only known in their communities for this behaviour but are sometimes also labelled as *Papa-Defunto*<sup>163</sup>, the same popular slang for undertakers, or as “*arroz de velório*”<sup>164</sup>.

If the general Brazilian understanding that death and bad things can be attracted just by talking about them is taken into consideration, then one who is so interested in death to the point of becoming a regular wake-goer can have a high possibility of being seen as a personification of death itself. There is the possibility of being socially shunned or being made fun at.

Even if those present at the wake were aware that they were being watched, it is impossible to establish a direct communication between them and the watchers, since there is no device to enable interaction<sup>165</sup>. Those watching a virtual wake can see those actually present at the wake, but the reverse is not possible. Another thing which is not mentioned by the companies on their websites is that, in general, what is broadcasted are only the images of the wake, not the sound. In 2016, however, virtual wakes with sound started to be offered by *Grupo Vila*<sup>166</sup>, but they will not be covered in this study. Figure 41 shows a virtual wake hosted by *Urbam*.

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<sup>163</sup> Dead-eater, in a free translation.

<sup>164</sup> Actually, the expression is “*arroz de festa*”, used to identify someone who is present in a lot of commemorations and parties. The expression comes from the traditional Portuguese dish, ‘sweet rice’, which was popular in parties. However, it has evolved to include people who like to attend *velórios* as well, therefore the adjustment ‘*arroz de velório*’, which has a pejorative tone to it.

<sup>165</sup> At least in the virtual wake services analysed in this study.

<sup>166</sup> But not all of them have this option enabled, which suggests virtual wakes with sound can possibly be more expensive to hire.



Figure 40 - Urbam's description of virtual wakes (24.04.2017)

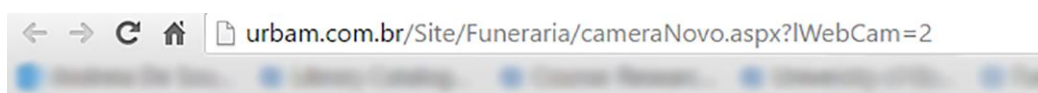


Figure 41 - View from one of Urbam's cameras (03.12.2015)

## 2 Virtual Wakes Versus Funeral Webcasting, Once Again

In all aspects, funerals are occasions for different social groups to converge (Walter et al., 2011). With the funeral industry's constant investment in digital technology, services like the downloading of music from the web or the displaying of the deceased's Facebook profile during the service are happening both in North American and British societies, along with the possibility to virtually attend both funeral and memorial services via streaming (Walter et al., 2011).

The online broadcast of a funeral service is known in the United States as funeral webcasting. Despite being offered since the beginning of the 2000's (Berko, 2014), it is still one of the latest trends in the industry. In Brazil, a similar service was introduced in 2001 and is known as *velório virtual*, or virtual wake (Martins, 2013). This is interesting because, as explained in Chapter 1, for Brazilians, a funeral is an unbreakable sequence of three rituals: *velório*, *cortejo* and disposal (which, in Brazil, is more likely to be a burial). However, the only thing that is broadcasted in Brazil is the wake itself, like the original name in Portuguese suggests. For this reason, it could not be called a funeral webcasting, as it does not involve the broadcasting of the cortège and disposal.

As similar as both services are, it is difficult to determine who came up with the concept of a virtual wake or funeral webcasting first. From its creation in the beginning of the 2000s, the service was found almost exclusively in Brazil and United States; their continental proportions make the offering and hiring of a virtual wake/funeral webcasting a logical occurrence. Recently, the possibility of the online transmission of a funeral service has become available in the UK as well, where they are called live-streamed funerals or webcast funerals (Dowling, 2016).

In the UK, however, there is a discussion which has not been quite addressed by the US and Brazil: the possibility of the online transmission of a funeral service to encourage mourners to become 'lazy' and not attend the ritual itself, which could result in the grieving process becoming more difficult for them. Another result of this 'laziness' could be a lack of support for the deceased's family (England, 2016). This possibility could perhaps become a reality in the UK and the US, mostly because traditional viewings are already optional. In the UK, it is even uncommon (Walter, 2013), and in either country, the funeral service is



a quick, orchestrated ceremony, which has the potential to not include those who knew the deceased but weren't very close to their family, as also seen in Chapter 1.

Geographic distance is the strongest premise of virtuality in the importance of social networks and the creation of a service like the virtual wake in Brazil. As aforementioned, in contemporary Brazil the news of a person dying, and the place and time of their wake is already given via social media, in alliance with the country's speedy way of dealing with funerary rites. Therefore, it is not strange for the wake to be transferred to virtuality as well, making it easier for mourners to participate, because they technically do not need to get off of work or travel great distances to be present; they can do so online.

For this reason, choosing to participate in a virtual wake in Brazil would be much more related to practical reasons than to laziness, as some suggest might become the case in the UK. This is perhaps the first instance where the concept of convenience, which is so present in the literature regarding funerals in the UK and the US, would be introduced in Brazilian funerals. Traditionally, convenience is not a part of Brazilian funerals, as the description provided in the first chapter of this thesis shows. However, it seems to be the norm in the UK and the US.

According to Gibson (2011), although the technically mediated and enhanced proximity is intended to overcome corporeal and geographical distances, distance remains. The user/viewer is aware of the experience of proximity, but in the case of the virtual wake, the distance is, for friends and family of the deceased, an alternative to the real wake rather than just a random event. Nevertheless, for strangers, the virtual wake can be exactly this, random, and the choice to watch it is also made based on the premise of distance, because despite the possibility to actually watch a wake in person, it is not a completely welcomed behaviour in urban Brazil.

As mentioned previously, these strangers can be members of the online group *Profiles de Gente Morta*. The group's main objective however, is not the visualisation of the virtual wakes, as discussed in Chapters 4 and 5. They are dedicated to searching, cataloguing and analysing the profiles of social media users that have died. Now, how Orkut-PGM and Facebook-PGM members understood and understand virtual wakes will be explored.

### 3 PGM and Virtual Wakes: Orkut

The first time I came across the term *velório virtual* was inside PGM, when it was still operating on Orkut. This was around 2009<sup>167</sup>, and traditional wakes were not new to me; I had already been to quite a few back then, so my initial curiosity was to find out what exactly could be virtual about them. This was an OFF Topic which, at the time, listed links to cameras from *Grupo Vila* and *Urbam*, who offered the service openly, meaning that anyone could view their broadcasts.

The OFF Topic on PGM about virtual wakes became so popular that, still in 2007, it was transformed into a separate community, external to PGM. This community was simply called ‘Virtual Wakes’. Many of its members belonged to PGM as well, and its *modus operandi* was quite similar to PGM. The community was active from then to the end of Orkut, but it will not be explored in this thesis.

Back then, I watched a couple of virtual wakes myself, using the links provided on PGM’s OFF Topic, but it was always difficult to know when they were happening: this occurred randomly because of their real-time nature. In addition, because of the technology available at the time, the best way to watch a virtual wake was to keep accessing PGM continuously, or to keep refreshing the funerary companies’ websites.

Since those links were readily available for PGM members to access them, the community was *the* place for watching virtual wakes. Awareness of the service outside of it<sup>168</sup> could have been practically confined to those who knew someone had died and had a virtual wake; moreover, the general public was still unaware of that possibility. The other, more complicated way to watch them would be to independently start searching for companies who offered the service, and then proceed to visit all their websites in order to find out which ones were openly available and keep watch.

From a superficial Google search<sup>169</sup>, there are more than 30 Brazilian funerary companies offering virtual wakes all over the country, and the majority of them did not offer an open visualisation option.

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<sup>167</sup> That particular topic was created in 2007, entitled “Wake Now”. In February 2013, it had 3.978 comments, but it was not the first one to be created with this intention. According to its creator, during an interview I conducted for my Master’s dissertation (Martins, 2013), there were two previous ones which were deleted by PGM’s moderation team, despite its popularity amongst community members.

<sup>168</sup> And of the “Virtual Wakes” community.

<sup>169</sup> Search made on 14.03.2018, analysing up to seven pages of results.



*Figure 42 - A wake broadcasted by Grupo Vila, in 2010 (still from a YouTube video)*

When the OFF Topic on Virtual Wakes was opened on PGM in 2007, the number of companies offering the service was even smaller, but it is impossible to determine exactly how many.

On PGM, the standard procedure was, after one of the members made a comment that there was a virtual wake being openly broadcasted at that moment, for those interested in it, and who were online at that same time, to follow the links and watch it. Those who liked to make comments about what they were seeing would do so in the community's topic. Reactions were very diverse.

Comments ranged from people who claimed to believe they were keeping the deceased company, others who mentioned praying. But many would be driven by curiosity; for this reason, their comments would mostly revolve around what was happening at the wake, or on the deceased's gender, if that was not apparent, or on the quantity of flowers, or on the lack of them. The number of people present at the wake, or their absence, was also a conversation topic, as the colour of the coffin or the behaviour of the attendees. Some declared to be scared or frightened by the experience and would guide the conversation towards the afterlife and the supernatural. At that time, virtual wakes broadcasted by *Urbam* or *Grupo Vila* had only one camera in each wake room, and this camera gave a grainy, blurred panoramic view of that room, as shown in Figure 42.

Many comments were also from PGM members who were very keen on watching a virtual wake, but were unlucky with their timing, finding about the last broadcast only after it had actually ended. Their comments sometimes contained statements like "I was dying to see a virtual wake!", or "I have been trying to watch one for days!".

But those were not the only types of comments made by PGM members while watching virtual wakes. Sometimes it would trigger them to share their personal views on death, dying and its rituals, and even sharing personal experiences. Unfortunately, there are no screenshots depicting these types of personal interactions between PGM members during those times. This is because, during data collection for my first research project on virtual wakes (Martins, 2013), the original Orkut-PGM was closed for no apparent reason. It was re-created days after its closure, but all the interactions were lost. Since Orkut itself was losing popularity and was later definitely closed, that second Orkut-PGM was never developed.

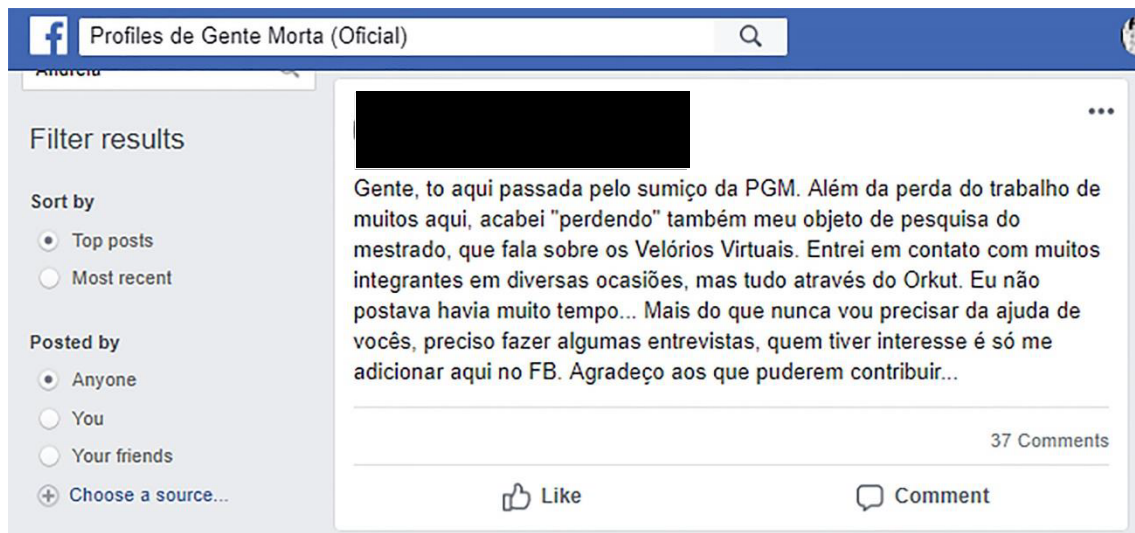


Figure 43 - My post about the deletion of Orkut-PGM, asking Facebook-PGM members to help me with conducting my Master's research (25.04.2012)

Figure 43 shows a post I made on Facebook-PGM in 2012, asking members for information about Orkut-PGM's closure. My post was:

You guys, I'm perplexed by PGM's disappearance. In addition to the loss of many here, I have also "lost" the research object of my masters, which is about Virtual Wakes. I got in touch with many members on several occasions, but all through Orkut. I haven't been posting for a long time ... More than ever I will need your help, I need to do some interviews, anyone who is interested can just add me as a friend here on Facebook. I thank all of you who can contribute...

In the comments section of this post, members were also expressing how surprised they were about the extinction of Orkut-PGM. Some considered it as a "lack of respect" towards them, while others mentioned that, from then on, they would no longer be logging onto Orkut, or that they liked Facebook-PGM better. However, one member wrote that the reason why Orkut-PGM was deleted was because of complaints from family members who did not agree with PGM's intent. Her suspicion was that the complaints developed from the suicide of the ex-wife of a former mayor of a city in the interior of the state of São Paulo. She jumped from the top of a hotel and it was all filmed.

### **3.1 Orkut-PGM Poll: "Why Do Some People Like to Watch Wakes on the Internet?"**

Because of the extinction of Orkut-PGM in 2012, as stated in the previous section, the only way to understand why its members watched virtual wakes is through a poll. This poll was created in August 2007 (Figure 44) by a PGM member and, by June 2009, when the screenshot was acquired, it had 917 votes. It offered six options for voting:

- 1) Because it's different and new;
- 2) Because of curiosity;
- 3) Because they like it;
- 4) Because they cannot go to wakes in person;
- 5) To observe the behaviour of those at the wake, and
- 6) Can't explain.

Unsurprisingly, when it comes to PGM members, the most voted option was 'Curiosity' (359 votes, 39%). However, reasons for them to be curious or

somehow attracted to images of death are not going to be addressed further, as they were covered in previous chapters. The 'Can't explain' option was the second most popular one (227 votes, 25%), and it resounded, perhaps, with those who did not understand what virtual wakes were or their practical applications in real life.

The next most voted option was 'To observe the behaviour of those at the wake' (103 votes, 11%), and it shows the voyeuristic aspect of PGM, putting virtual wakes as some kind of entertainment, in which the main purpose was to enable others to see how wake-goers behave, or how wakes are organised. With a very small difference in votes, the option 'Because it's different and new' (100 votes, 10%) was the fourth most popular. This option can be linked to curiosity, in the sense that virtual wakes, at that time, were more of a novelty than they are now.

'Because they like it' (69 votes, 7%) was the second least voted option, and can perhaps be linked to the aforementioned practice some people have of actually attending real wakes of people they do not know. The way this option is worded seems to state that these people *like* to go to wakes, rather than the idea that, by doing so, they would be fulfilling a social and religious duty. This duty would then be a vestige of 19<sup>th</sup> century practices which were still in vogue in Brazil by the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The only option which resounds with the reasons why virtual wakes were created in the first place, according to the description offered by the funerary companies presented earlier in this chapter, is the 'Because they cannot go to wakes in person' (59 votes, 6%). It is interesting to observe that this was the least voted one, and this is perhaps a reflection of the way virtual wakes were understood by Orkut-PGM members at the time. Then, it was a new, curious technological possibility which enabled them, strangers, to watch the wake of someone they did not know.

As with other polls available on Orkut, there was also a space for respondents to leave comments about the question or elaborate on their answers. Eight of these comments are visible in the screenshot, and they revolve around people being "crazy" for wanting to watch virtual wakes, or curious because "death is a part of life".

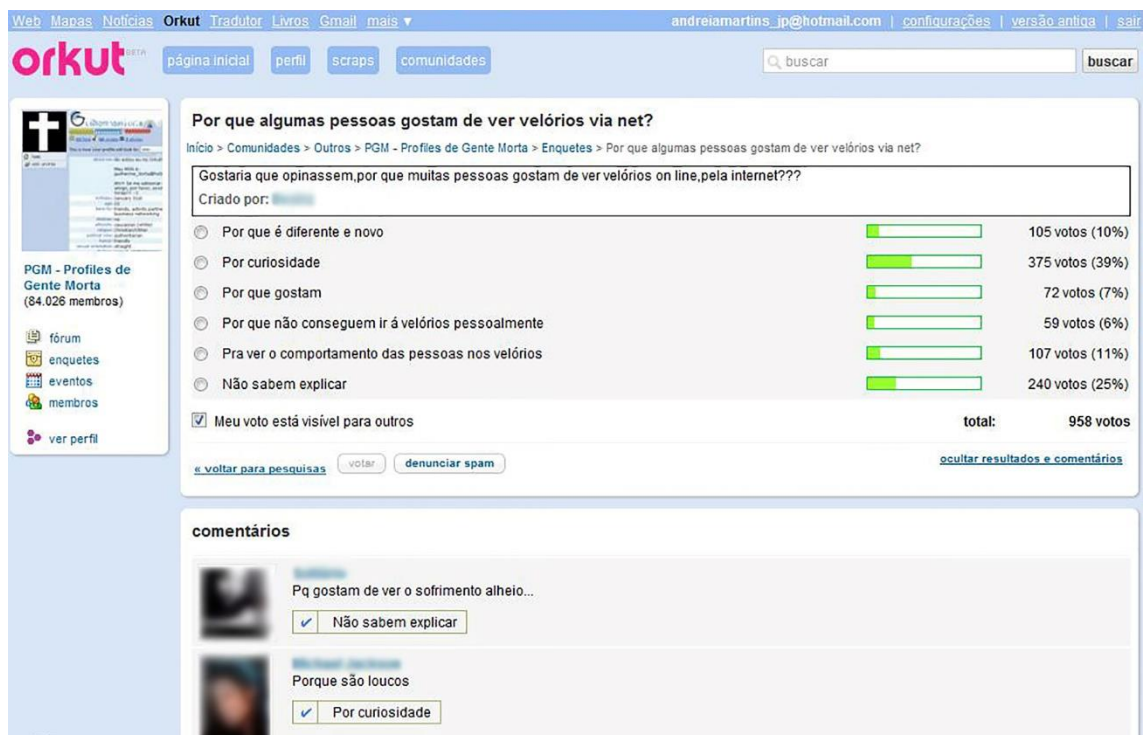


Figure 44 - 'Why do some people like to watch wakes on the Internet?' poll (14.08.2007)



#### **4 PGM and Virtual Wakes: Facebook**

The way virtual wakes were watched by PGM members changed when the group moved to Facebook, but only in structural terms. The basis remained the same: members follow the links provided in a post dedicated to the theme and return to the group to make comments about what they are seeing. These comments are, in general, in accordance to the ones made on Orkut.

On Facebook, there is the option of saving a determined post to be able to accompany its development, or to enable notifications for when there is a new post or comment made in a group one is a member of. This feature enabled the visualisation of virtual wakes to become instantaneous, because from the moment a member would comment “virtual wake happening now”, potentially thousands of others would be immediately informed of it on a notification on their Facebook profiles, which can be easily accessed via their smartphones via Facebook app. There is also the possibility of receiving an email every time such notifications arise, and as emails are also accessible through smartphones and mobile internet, this is also a considerable change in how virtual wakes are now watched.

As Orkut was mostly accessible via a desktop or laptop, watching the real-time broadcast of a wake depended on PGM members accessing Orkut and PGM at the same time a wake was being broadcast. Now, with mobile internet and smartphones, access to the group on Facebook depends only on acknowledging notifications. This has made virtual wake-watching easier and quicker.

Therefore, it is possible to affirm that mobile apps changed the way in which social network sites are accessed, therefore changing the way in which the group is accessed, then changing the way in which virtual wakes are consumed, in combination with Facebook’s own interface and characteristics. Facebook provides a more favourable setting because it can be accessed instantly, and instant access to Facebook is possible because of mobile internet and Facebook’s app. The combination of these factors provides a higher chance of PGM members being able to catch a virtual wake while it is happening.

Still, if they are not able to, they can still rely on a Facebook feature: the possibility to include screenshots of the actual wakes on the group. This way, members who, for different reasons, cannot access the images, are now included

in the conversation because these screenshots are made available to them. Before, if a member could not access the cameras, they could not see what the virtual wake was about.

The real-time characteristic of virtual wakes can be impractical to those interested in them: PGM members might be working or carrying out other life duties, unable to stop what they are doing to follow the notification on their smartphones and watch the broadcast. This is where other PGM members come into play when they supply screenshots of virtual wakes to those who are unable to access them, as shown in Figure 45. This is another way in which Facebook has changed the consumption of virtual wakes.

The original post on virtual wakes on Facebook-PGM is no longer available. This might have happened after its author either left the group or deactivated her/his Facebook account. However, new ones, with the same links and others, have been created to substitute it, so the visualisation continues. But in this particular case, a plethora of screenshots depicting members' interactions were acquired.

Comments on ordinary things like the number of attendees and flowers continued to be the norm. Sometimes, as it was on Orkut, the sharing of experiences with wakes, and members' points of view on them would arise, as shown in the following screenshots.

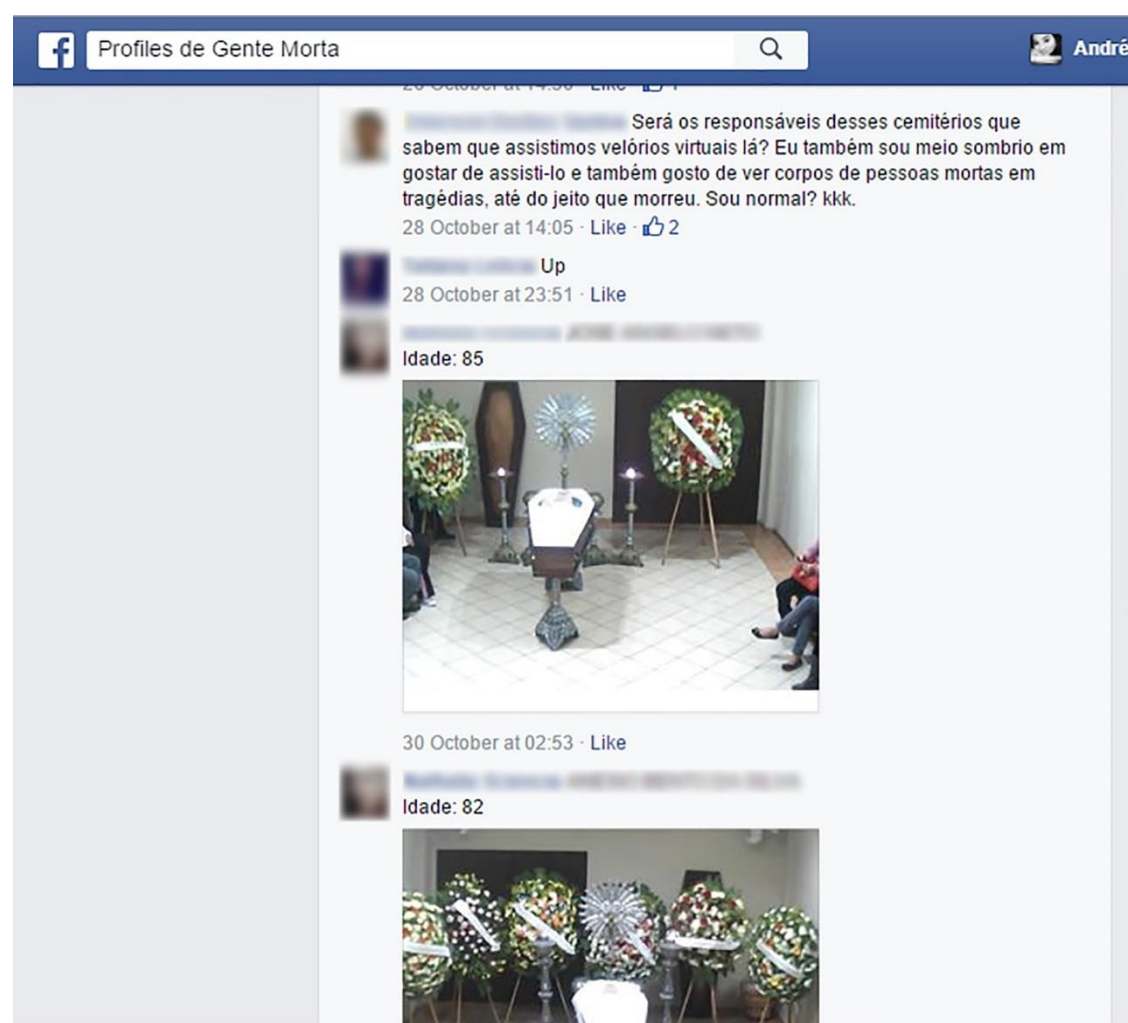


Figure 45 - Facebook-PGM members providing screenshots of the virtual wakes they are watching (30.10.2015)

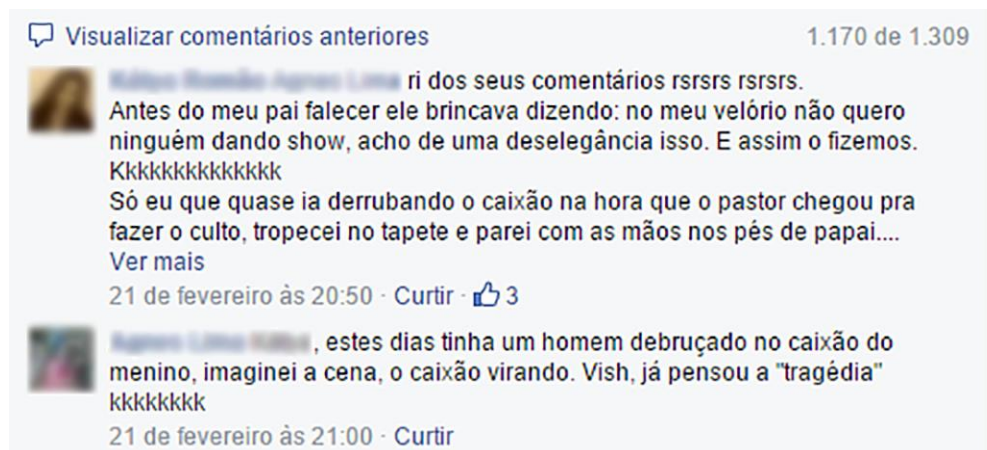


Figure 46 – Member narrating her experience at her father's wake and the fear of tipping the coffin over (23.02.2015)

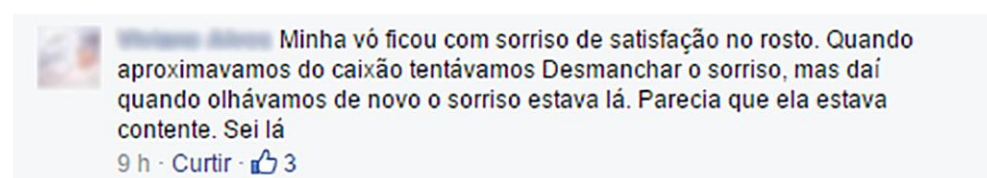


Figure 47 - Member commenting about a 'grin' her grandmother had during her wake (23.02.2015)

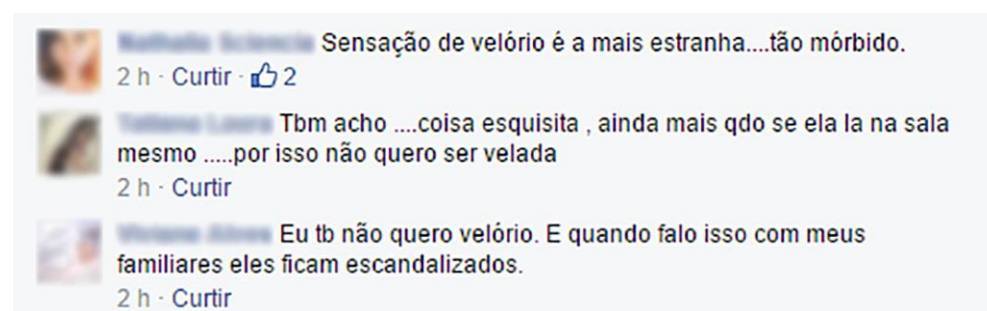


Figure 48 - Members talking about their views on wakes (23.02.2015)

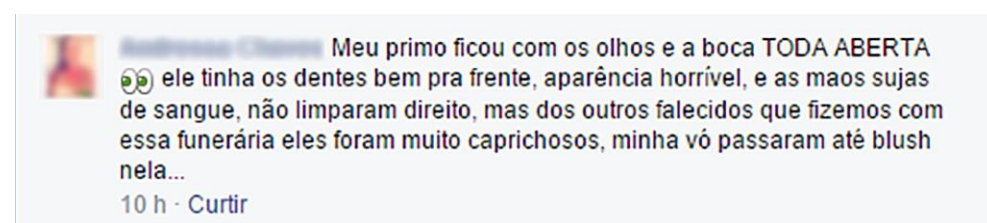


Figure 49 – Comparing the preparation for the members' cousin's and grandmother's wakes (23.02.2015)

Figure 46 is about two members discussing about the possibility of a coffin being turned over during a wake. Because normally they are propped on pedestals, some might find the arrangement dangerous, especially if the wake is filled with people, as it normally is. The first comment is from a member who tripped during her father's wake and she almost fell, finding support from the coffin itself, at her father's feet. The second comment is from a member who was watching a virtual wake and thought about the "tragedy" of a coffin being indeed knocked over.

The following two screenshots are from members who described how their loved ones looked during their wakes. Figure 47 is about the member's grandmother, who looked like she had a "grin of satisfaction" and that they tried to undo that expression, but it was not possible, seeming like she was "content". Figure 49 is from a member whose cousin remained with his eyes and mouth open during the wake, and that his hands were "still stained with blood". But when her grandmother was prepared by the same funerary company, she thought that she had been treated better, because they had "even applied some blush" on her face.

Figure 48 depicts the interaction between three members, who are discussing wakes and their "strange feeling of morbidity". They claim to not want one at the time of their deaths. The third member claims her/his family is "scandalised" whenever she/he brings up the subject of not wanting a wake. Maybe their reaction is related to the fact that wakes are so embedded in Brazilian funerary culture, that to forgo one is a deviation from the norm. Also, it might be because the member's parents believe that the wake is intended for the living rather than for the dead, so they would understand it as a denial of an opportunity of healing and coping with death, especially in the circumstance of their daughter dying before them.

These observations are important because the topics raised by them are not always openly welcomed by Brazilian society; therefore, PGM has become the place for its members to be able to speak openly about their experiences and their views on death and dying. Such discussions were sparked by one major change in the way virtual wakes were watched by Facebook-PGM members: by the time PGM moved to Facebook, technology was becoming more and more accessible, and the popularity of the virtual wakes as well. Because of this,

funerary companies, such as *Grupo Vila*, installed more cameras in their wake rooms. One of them is located directly above the coffin. If, in previous years, all that could be seen during a virtual wake was a panoramic view of the wake room, now it has become possible to see the deceased's face and the coffin in detail.

Because of this new way to watch virtual wakes, on PGM, discussions also revolved around the work of funerary companies and their abilities to prepare the body for the wake. The way the deceased looked also started to be a theme for conversations, with comments like "it looks like he is sleeping", or "she seems uncomfortable, like drowning in flowers", referring to the abundant use of flowers in Brazilian wakes, as discussed in Chapter 1.

This might seem disrespectful or tasteless to some, especially the British, for whom the whole concept of wakes, as understood by Brazilians, is practically lost (Walter, 2013). But for Brazilians this is very important, and it is one of the reasons why the service was 'upgraded' to include this form of visualisation, and yet another reason for virtual wakes not to become an option for the 'lazy'.

If one watches a Brazilian virtual wake, one will most definitely see a dead body, not just a closed coffin located at the end of a room with people seating, listening to someone talk. In a Brazilian virtual wake, the face of the deceased is the face of death, and what can be witnessed is the interaction between mourners and between them and the deceased (Figures 50 and 51).

In addition, many Brazilians follow the 'see it to believe it' premise, so if this was a comfort that the earlier versions of virtual wakes were not able to fulfil, now they can, because by seeing the face of the deceased, they can now internalise the idea that that person is actually dead. All of these instances were taken into consideration when creating the questionnaire presented to Facebook-PGM members in 2015-2016. There were ten questions about virtual wakes, and they will be analysed next.



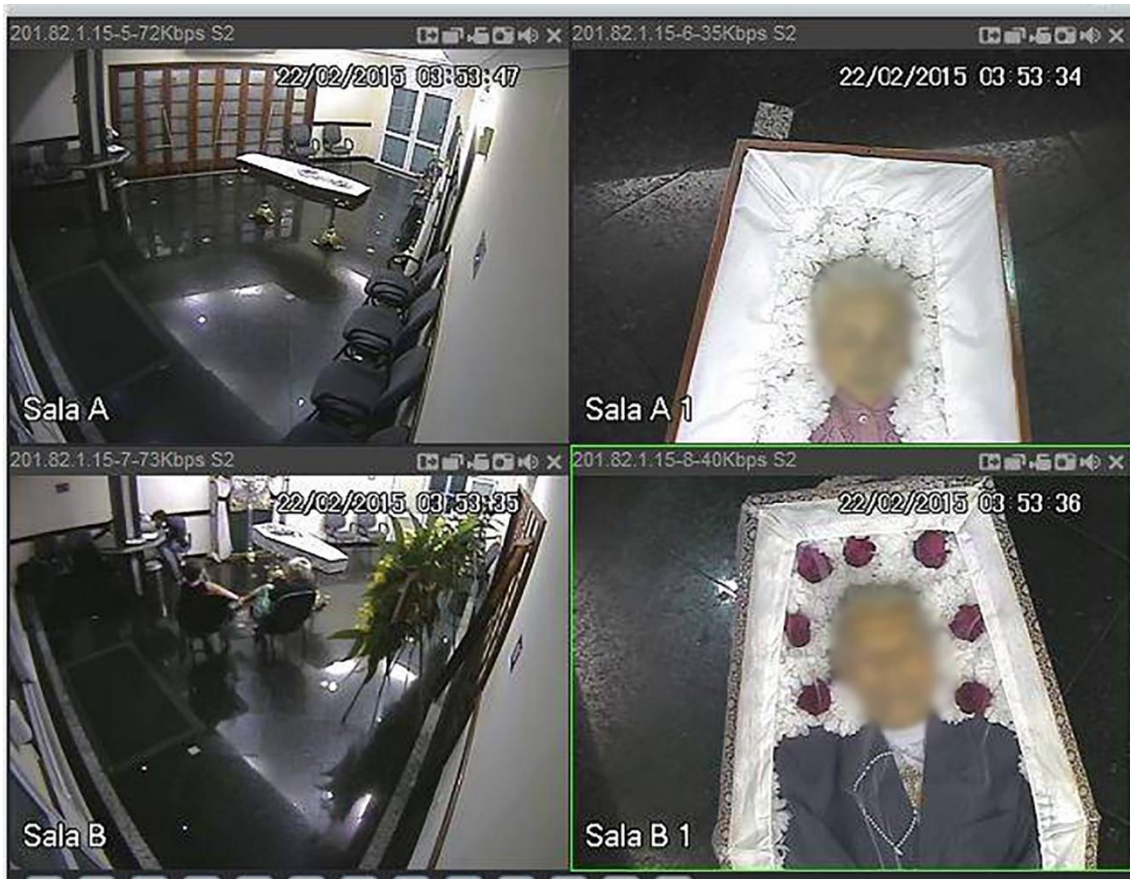


Figure 50 – View from cameras placed on top of coffins (22.02.2015)



Figure 51 - Cameras allow a more detailed view of the wakes (22.02.2015)

#### **4.1 Questionnaire: Do You Watch Virtual Wakes?**

As mentioned in the previous chapter, 274 Facebook-PGM members answered the questionnaire, which contained 25 questions, and ten of them were about virtual wakes. The first question on the theme was about trying to determine how many PGM members actually watched virtual wakes. There were three possible answers: 'Yes', 'No' and 'I don't know what a virtual wake is'.

The majority answered 'No' (130 votes, 47.44%). This was surprising due to the fact that the posts on virtual wakes were always very popular and busy, with several members commenting on them, and this sample might not accurately reflect the experience within the group. 'Yes' received 107 votes (39.05%).

There were 37 members who chose the option 'I don't know what a virtual wake is' (13.50%). This was also a surprise, exactly because, as mentioned, the posts on virtual wakes always seemed to attract a lot of attention, so one could presume it was something known to all PGM members. Perhaps, this option was chosen by those who had joined PGM fairly recently, by the time the questionnaire was made available, or that they had not been exploring the group after their membership approval.

#### **4.2 Questionnaire: What Are Your Reasons for Watching Virtual Wakes?**

If Brazilians are used to seeing images of death and dead bodies, as mentioned in the Introduction to this thesis, then why would they think virtual wakes could be interesting to watch? This is what this survey question aimed to answer. However, it is necessary to take rituals into consideration, before analysing the reasons provided by PGM members.

Although it is possible to define the stages of a Brazilian funeral in a similar way as the one proposed by Van Gennep (1960), its structure is much more complex, as the description provided here shows. The structure of a Brazilian funeral is clearly similar to the triangular structure proposed by Van Gennep (1960): it starts right after death when the body begins to be prepared, because this preparation is, more than anything, *for the velório*, for the body to be presentably displayed for its last goodbyes. During this preparation, the body is in the state of isolation, which persists during the *velório* itself, despite it being



surrounded by people: the deceased is the only one placed inside a coffin, which is the main element, apart from death, to characterise this state of isolation.

The *cortejo* is then the stage of marginality, where the deceased is not here nor there; they are dead, so they are no longer a part of the world of the living, and while disposal does not happen, their permanence is one of marginality. The state of reincorporation is the disposal phase of the funeral, where the deceased enters the realm of the dead, either by the cemetery or by the crematorium.

The wake is a lengthy ritual, lasting for up to 24 hours, and the body, inside a coffin, is always on display. People congregate around it for the duration of the wake and interact with it in many ways. Even if the place where a wake is held is close to the place of disposal (as aforementioned, many funerary companies own wake centres, cemeteries and crematoria, and wake rooms and centres can be placed inside cemeteries), the *cortejo* is not optional, but only shortened.

These are the fundamental reasons why wakes can be interesting to watch, especially in their virtual form. Since funerals in Brazil have shifted from a public to a private experience, as Chapter 3 explained, people nowadays can be just curious about what happens in it, about how people behave, and what is socially expected in this context. As the wake is a ritual where the body is normally on display, enabling others to interact with it, the interest in watching it can be linked to witnessing this very interaction between the living and the dead in a ritualistic setting.

On the other hand, curiosity around virtual wakes can also be placed under the light of entertainment: as shown here, Brazilians do not shy away from public displays of emotion; thus, Brazilian funerals can be understood as cathartic rituals, especially the wake: in its duration, the pain and sadness that can accompany the loss of a loved one is, most of the time, clearly observed. For this reason, virtual wakes could be just as interesting to watch as a telenovela or any other form of social drama; the only difference being that it is not a rehearsed production, but a live broadcast of actual people attending an extremely important death ritual, displaying real, raw emotions. This can also be one of the reasons why members of the *Profiles de Gente Morta* group sometimes choose to watch virtual wakes.

A potential link between virtual wakes and post-mortem photography could be made if one considers that PGM members can collect screenshots as others

have collected post-mortem postal cards in previous centuries. But these were not suggested in the questionnaire or mentioned in the comments provided by some PGM members.

There were four possible answers to this question: 'I find it an interesting idea' (50 votes, 18.24%), 'I have never been to a real wake, so I want to know how it works' (0 votes), 'I am interested in how people behave at a wake' (54 votes, 19.70%), 'I am in mourning and think that watching others going through the same situation can be soothing' (3 votes, 1.09%), and 'I do not watch Virtual Wakes' (154 votes, 56.20%).

These were constructed based on previous research on the theme of virtual wakes (Martins, 2013), and on answers collected then from private interviews with the most active PGM members. The first three options were the most common ones identified either through them, or through observing the group over more than a decade.

It was surprising to see the 'I have never been to a real wake, so I wanted to see how it works' option receiving no votes, because this was a justification which often appeared on Orkut-PGM quite frequently. This was because, since the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, some Brazilians started to see wakes as inappropriate events for children, so it would be accurate to assume that many Brazilians could reach adulthood without ever participating in a wake. Still, if one takes into consideration the most common causes of death in the country, as elucidated in Chapters 1 and 4, there is a large possibility of attending the wake of a friend or family member before reaching the legal age in Brazil, which is 18 years.

Perhaps violence and accidents are the main reasons why this option received no votes, because Brazilians do go to wakes of those who are important to them. Therefore, already knowing what a wake is and what people do at them is not a plausible reason to watch a virtual version of it. By this, one could very well ask where the curiosity lies, then, if the majority of people know what a wake is, so they do not need to watch a virtual one to reduce their ignorance. One answer could be simply because it is possible to do so, or because it is interesting to see others going through a common experience.

12 members did elaborate on their answers, but no indication was made towards watching virtual wakes because of their ritualistic nature, or as a form of

entertainment. Three of such elaborated answers were from members who claimed to not know what a virtual wake was, but some mentioned being curious about it now that they had learnt about the service. One of them said she/he knew about online memorials, but “wouldn’t have a problem with watching a virtual wake”. There was also a comment about never being able to actually watch one, despite her/his interest, and that the member agreed with statements number one and three, but her/his personal reason for watching virtual wakes was to see if there was someone she/he knew from her/his city, São José dos Campos, where *Urbam*, the public funerary company, is located. Another comment was about having watched a lot of virtual wakes in the past, but since they made her/him feel bad, the member stopped watching altogether.

Other comments revolved around curiosity to see what it was about, therefore watching them only once or a handful of times. One of the most interesting comments, which makes a connection with the notion of an old behaviour being put into practice with new tools, was from a member who claimed to watch the virtual wakes in order to watch over the deceased, because “some are even left alone!”, a situation many Brazilians find sad, as briefly mentioned in Chapter 1. In addition, there was one undetermined answer.

From analysing answers to this question, it was impossible to determine if and/or how watching virtual wakes can differ from other forms of entertainment, even those related to death or the macabre, such as visiting dark tourism sites. What was shown is that, apart from the potential interest in dead bodies in a ritualistic setting, there is also an interest in life stories, or in confirming that others have gone through the harrowing experience of losing a loved one and that one is not alone in this experience.

#### **4.3 Questionnaire: How Often Do You Watch Virtual Wakes?**

From observing PGM, it was clear that there was a divide between those who were just discovering virtual wakes and those who seemed to watch them quite frequently. Normally, the latter would be the ones to raise the alarm on a virtual wake being broadcasted, thus getting the group’s attention to the fact and inviting others to join them. This question was an attempt to determine the frequency with which PGM members watched virtual wakes. Answers, again, were provided in a multiple-choice structure, and the option to leave comments

was also available. Choices were: 'I do not watch Virtual Wakes' (165 votes, 60.21%), 'Sometimes, I cannot say precisely' (93 votes, 33.94%), 'Every day' (eight votes, 2.91%), 'Every week' (six votes, 2.18%) and 'Every month' (two votes, 0.72%).

This time, the number of members who answered 'I don't watch virtual wakes' was higher than those who answered question number one. Then, there were 130 votes for 'No' to "Do you watch virtual wakes?". In this question, 165 claimed not to watch them. Reasons for this disparity are unclear.

#### **4.4 Questionnaire: Do Your Family/friends Know You Watch Virtual Wakes?**

Answers to this question can give hints as to why so many claimed not to watch virtual wakes in the first and in the previous question. Some claimed to have watched it only once, so they do not consider themselves as spectators. Others claimed they felt bad about it, so they do not do it anymore. So, for this question, there were only two possible answers: 'Yes' (43 answers, 15.69%) and 'No' (231 answers, 84.30%). In the 'No' option, in regard to its higher number, it is important to stress that it also contains votes from those who do not watch virtual wakes at all, along with those whose family and/or friends do not know about them watching virtual wakes. Those who answered 'Yes' were supposed to elaborate their feedback experience in the following question, which is going to be developed next.

In the same fashion as one of the questions analysed in the previous chapter, following this particular question, the questionnaire asked: "If yes, have you received any kind of comment or criticism?". Its aim was to collect further information on the opinions from those around PGM members who knew about them being virtual wakes spectators. 43 answered 'Yes' to the previous question, but only 33 answered this one, which was completely discursive. Nine declared having never received criticism. There was a very strong 'No' discursive reply from a member who declared that watching virtual wakes of strangers was a "privacy invasion". Another member said 'No' to ever being criticised but claimed that some find it "strange and then come watch it too... afterwards, they say: 'why do you like to watch this?'".

Again, words to characterise this practice revolved around craziness, morbidity, strangeness, surprise and curiosity. 'Craziness' was the most frequently used word (eight times), followed by 'surprise', 'curious' and 'absurd', which were all placed in the same category (three times). Feelings of strangeness and reactions with expressions such as "this doesn't do you good" each appeared twice in the answers. One answer with the "it doesn't do you good" expression was about a member whose husband was so disturbed by her watching virtual wakes, to the point he asked her to stop.

Morbidity was only mentioned once, when a member wrote that people tell her/him "wow, you love morbid things and seeing other people's suffering!". Another member claimed that some found the behaviour funny: "people laugh at me, I think they do not take me seriously". One member wrote that she/he did not watch virtual wakes and there were three undetermined answers.

#### **4.5 Questionnaire: Have You Ever Watched the Virtual Wake of Someone You Know?**

As aforementioned, the majority of wakes advertised on PGM are from people unknown to the group's members. A case of a member who actually knew the deceased whose virtual wake was being advertised on PGM is unheard of. This question was to discover if this was a possibility, even if outside of PGM. There were two options for answering it: 'Yes' and 'No'. 'No' was the most popular option, with 269 votes (98.17%), which includes members who have only watched virtual wakes of strangers.

Unsurprisingly, the numbers for 'Yes' were quite low, with only five votes (1.82%). Maybe this is related to the dominant age-range of the group (and of those who answered this questionnaire). If the majority of them belong to the 16 to 29 years age range, as expressed in the previous chapter, it is very likely that the majority of them is still in education.

Normally, Brazilians enter university at 18 years of age, and the average undergraduate degree takes four years to complete. By this calculation, the average Brazilian will only effectively join the work force, working full-time, by the time they are 22 years old. Part-time jobs are not common in the country, so it is quite difficult to combine working and studying. Another factor that must be taken into consideration is that, currently, the majority of Brazilians are seeking

employment with the government. As briefly mentioned in a previous chapter, these jobs are highly competitive, with entry tests that are held throughout the country. The average time it takes for a Brazilian to prepare and pass such exams to be admitted into the governmental workforce is three years (Folha Dirigida, 2016), which would possibly bring them to the age of 25.

Taking these factors into consideration it is possible to say members of this age group, therefore the majority in this questionnaire, would be able to skip school, university or work to attend a wake. And since their social network is still quite possibly local, perhaps restricted to the state and city they live in, it can be fairly possible to affirm they would not have to worry about travelling long distances either<sup>170</sup>. As a matter of fact, the only situations where I learnt of someone who watched the virtual wake of someone they knew was from Brazilians who were living abroad at the time a member of their family died, and they would not be able to travel to Brazil on such short notice in order to physically attend the wake.

Another reason for this might be that they are against the idea of hiring a virtual wake for their family and friends, so they would not want to take part in one, even if it was the wake of someone they loved. Perhaps, having to resort to watching it online could be seen as something of a failure for them, especially if they are religious, as the majority of PGM members declared to be in the 2007 poll analysed in Chapter 4. There is no reason to believe this religious predominance has changed on Facebook-PGM because of the prevalence of religion in Brazil, especially Catholicism for whom the wake is even more important.

#### **4.6 Questionnaire: Have You Ever Participated in Real Wakes of Strangers?**

To counterbalance the visualisation of virtual wakes of strangers, this question was to discover if PGM members had been to actual wakes of people they did not personally know. Surprisingly, many answered 'Yes' (112 votes, 40.87%), but the majority still voted 'No' (162 votes, 59.12%). Perhaps this is an

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<sup>170</sup> The concept of long distances is quite relative in Brazil. A six-hour trip, for example, can easily be considered normal in such circumstances, as it is the time it takes to drive from Rio to São Paulo, or vice-versa, for example.

indication that Brazilians in general are comfortable with attending wakes of people they did not know personally, but with whom they had some sort of connection.

This connection could be relatively 'weak', like family members of friends or colleagues, for example. This can prove that there is still a social and religious sense of duty underlining attending wakes of people who were not complete strangers. This participation can be a means to show affection or respect; perhaps not directly to the deceased, but to their family. Attending the wake of a complete stranger – real or virtual, can be seen as frowned upon, so this is why those who are interested in it can be keener on doing it virtually, because they are protected by anonymity.

#### **4.7 Questionnaire: What Kind of Things Do You Do While Watching a Virtual Wake?**

It was already established that a portion of PGM members do watch virtual wakes, and some do it frequently, though the majority cannot say precisely how often. But what do they do while watching one? There were four possible answers for this question, again based on observing the group and their comments throughout the years. Options were:

- 1) 'I pray';
- 2) 'I accompany the discussions on PGM',
- 3) 'Nothing, I just watch', and
- 4) 'I do not watch Virtual Wakes'.

Again, there was a disparity in the numbers of those who claimed not to watch virtual wakes, for unidentifiable reasons<sup>171</sup>. When adding the numbers from the first three possible answers for this question, the total of those who claim to do something while watching virtual wakes is 107, exactly the same number of those who answered 'Yes' to the first question.

If the 'I do not watch Virtual Wakes' option (158 votes, 57.66%) was disregarded, then the most popular option becomes 'Nothing, I just watch' (70 votes, 25.54%). 'Accompanying the discussions on PGM' was the second most

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<sup>171</sup> There were 130 votes for the first question on the theme, which was "Do you watch virtual wakes". But for this question, in particular, there were 158 votes for the option "I do not watch virtual wakes". Maybe it is safe to assume that some of the proposed questions were misinterpreted.

voted option (36 votes, 13.13%), which does not mean that members who do so are just watching the comments roll by; it also means that they can be actively participating in the debate by posting their own comments.

Lastly, the least voted option was 'I pray', which received only two votes (0.72%). But since there was the possibility to give discursive answers as well to this question, one member answered that she/he prays and accompanies the discussions on the group, and another, that she/he prays and observe "the suffering of those who lost a dear one".

Three people wrote that they did not watch virtual wakes, perhaps emphasising their 'No' vote, but one of them claimed that she/he would like to watch a virtual wake. Other interesting comments came from two members. One said she/he thinks about "the cause of death, and the deceased's family", and the other, that she/he "observes people's attitudes, because only a few care about the deceased, many just want to talk between them", which is a very interesting statement. There was one undetermined answer.

#### **4.8 Questionnaire: How Would You Feel if You Knew that Strangers Were Watching the Virtual Wake of a Member of Your Family or One of Your Friends?**

It is very likely that those present at a wake which is openly broadcasted on the Internet are unaware of the possibility that strangers could be watching them. So, as PGM members are potentially these strangers watching the wake of others, this question was to make them think about how *they* would feel if their roles were reversed. This was an open question, meaning that responders were free to insert their own answers. Again, some were quite discursive.

To analyse them, they were separated in seven categories, again following the rule of classifying them according to the first adjective used to express their opinion. There were two undetermined answers (0.72%). Categories are:

- 1) Normal;
- 2) Nothing, would not mind, indifferent, no problem, whatever;
- 3) Do not know;
- 4) Invaded, uncomfortable, bad;
- 5) Weird, bothered, strange;
- 6) Moved, comforted, and
- 7) Curious.



Interestingly enough, the majority of members (79 answers, 28.83%) claimed they would feel normal if they were the ones being watched. In their answers, there were a lot of mentions to respect, in the sense that, if they knew people were behaving respectfully while watching them at a wake, they would be OK with it. One member feels this normality comes from a notion she/he has that many people are interested in learning about the deceased's life story.

Then, there were those who answered they would not feel anything, be completely indifferent, or would not mind having strangers watching the wake of someone they loved (56 answers, 20.43%). There were also plenty of mentions to 'respect'. Maybe this is because they know that PGM members can act disrespectfully while watching a virtual wake, based on the comments they make in the group.

Those who did not know how they would feel in that position of being observed totalled 19 members (6.93%). Many of them claimed it is because they have not thought about that before, so they could not come up with a quick answer. Others also claimed, after saying they 'didn't know', that they would potentially feel 'weird' or 'uncomfortable'. One even wrote: "I don't know if I would like it. I sometimes watch virtual wakes, despite finding it a very private moment for each family".

The same number of answers (19, 6.93%) were given by those who thought they would feel 'invaded', 'uncomfortable' or 'bad' if they knew strangers were watching the virtual wake of someone they loved. The theme of 'lack of respect' re-emerged in these answers, but not because they would be leery of watchers behaving disrespectfully, but because they think watching virtual wakes of strangers is something disrespectful in itself. There were a lot of mentions to privacy or feeling exposed, but the majority claimed they would simply feel uncomfortable in knowing they were being watched.

Those who claimed they would feel 'weird', 'bothered' or 'strange' (11 answers, 4.01%) were placed separately because their answers did not contain the same, strong aversion to the idea of being watched or to having a virtual wake for that matter. Their disliking of the idea was expressed in milder terms, like the feeling of 'being watched' or 'being sad'. One member wrote: "At first I would find it strange, but afterwards I would forget about the camera and it wouldn't make any difference".

Interestingly, there were those who claimed they would feel 'moved' or 'comforted' (three answers, 1.09%), and a 'sense of solidarity' just by knowing that strangers were watching the virtual wake of someone who was so important to them. One of them wrote: "I would feel comforted because I believe this is a way to show respect and regard towards the deceased's loved ones". The last category, which also contains three answers (1.09%), comprises comments from PGM members who would feel 'curious' about the spectators, and would want to interact with them to find out how they were feeling and behaving.

#### **4.9 Questionnaire: For You, What Are the Main Reasons to Hire a Virtual Wake?**

Virtual wakes are portrayed on PGM under a light of curiosity. Because of this, there was a possibility that members of the group did not fully grasp its actual purpose, which is to enable those who cannot attend a wake in person, to do so virtually. The reason for posing this question was to try and see their understanding of these purposes, but without providing details, which could only be possible if explanations to the question were provided. But this was not done because these explanations could have influenced answers. There were three options to vote, which were:

- 1) 'Distance';
- 2) 'People cannot attend the wake in person', and
- 3) 'Technological curiosity'.

It was interesting to see that the option which defined the purpose of a virtual wake the best, was also the most voted, if compared to the poll on Orkut-PGM with the same theme, in Chapter 4. This option was 'People cannot attend the wake in person' (135 votes, 49.27%). The second most voted, which is related to the previous one, was 'Distance' (66 votes, 24.08%). However, the difference between this option and the third most voted was of just one vote. This third option was 'Technological curiosity' (65 votes, 23.72%).

This 'technological curiosity' might be exemplified by the fact that Brazilians like technological, especially electronic novelty, and are now keen to experiment. For example, Brazil is one of 32 countries in the world with an electronic voting system (TSE, 2018). As mentioned previously, voting in the country is mandatory, and since 1996 it is done electronically. Credit cards are another example: they

are the main form of payment in the country, used by more than 52 million Brazilians (SPC, 2015).

These credit cards are used daily, for any and every kind of purchase. For more expensive items, such as electronics, purchases are made in instalments (SPC, 2017); in fact, paying by instalments is so common in Brazil that not only more expensive items are payable in that modality. In addition, a 2013 report stated that Brazil is the second in the world in consuming electronic goods (Accenture, 2013). Therefore, technology is very present in day-to-day life, as the numbers regarding the use of the Internet and the possession of mobile phones mentioned earlier have also shown.

Since there was the possibility for responders to add discursive answers to this question as well, eight of them did so. Two of them placed 'curiosity' alone, detaching it from the technological aspect. The other five gave very interesting statements. One suggested the main reason to hire a virtual wake would be "to go further into the realm of death", while another claimed it was because "there is a public for it". Some were quite negative in their answers, writing that they "couldn't see a reason" for doing it at all, or that it is a demonstration of "lack of consideration" and a result of "Internet's easiness". One simply wrote "I don't watch them".

However, one of the most interesting replies was: "I believe that even in death we try to offer our best, and in these cases, the technology is this 'something extra'". This question is fairly similar to the poll which was available on Orkut, examined at the beginning of this chapter.

## **5 Summary**

Data presented in this chapter combined opinions from Orkut and Facebook-PGM members on virtual wakes. For Orkut-PGM, a poll showed that curiosity was the main reason for watching virtual wakes. As opposed to what it was during Orkut times, instantaneity, brought by mobile internet and apps, is a major differentiator in the dynamics of consuming virtual wakes on Facebook-PGM, as well as the possibility to make screenshots of these very wakes available to other PGM members who were unable to watch the actual broadcast as it was happening.

In addition, a series of ten questions, part of a questionnaire applied to the group, uncovered that the reason for them to watch virtual wakes was that they were interested in seeing how people behave at a wake, which can also be interpreted as curiosity. The majority, however, claimed not to watch virtual wakes at all. Those who do, were not able to indicate how often they perform this activity. Almost half of those who watch virtual wakes claimed that their family and friends are aware of the behaviour, and those who had been criticised for it said watching virtual wakes was classified as something “crazy”, “morbid” and “strange”.

Very few Facebook-PGM members who watch virtual wakes have watched the virtual wake of someone they knew, and the majority have never been to actual wakes of people they did not know. Those who watch virtual wakes claimed they do not perform any other activity while doing so. The overall majority claimed they would feel “normal” if they knew that the wake of someone they loved was being watched by strangers. Facebook-PGM members think that the main reason to hire a virtual wake is for allowing people who are not able to attend the wake in person to still participate on the ritual.

One of the reasons why the majority of PGM members were against the idea of virtual wakes can be that, at a regular wake, people are policing each other. They know and see what others are doing, and if they act in a disrespectful manner, they can be reprimanded. What PGM members are not comfortable with virtual wakes is perhaps the lack of control one has over those who are attending it virtually. The virtual wakes offered by *Urbam* and *Grupo Vila* offer only a one-way camera: watchers can see those at the actual wake, but not the other way around. Consequently, there is a sense of being watched without knowing who the watcher is, or what they are doing whilst watching.

This overall resistance from the majority of Facebook-PGM members can be linked to their experience in the group and their knowledge of how disrespectful some people can be when watching the virtual wake of a stranger. Perhaps, they would not like to submit their loved ones to this kind of scrutiny.

## 6 Closing Arguments

This work was developed with the intent to explore the Brazilian *velório* in three settings:

- 1) How it was performed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century;
- 2) Which changes occurred at that time, allowing it to
- 3) Be transformed into a moment that can be broadcasted on the Internet, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, becoming the *velório virtual*/virtual wake.

In order to contextualise these settings, it was necessary, first, to describe and highlight differences between *velórios* and other ceremonies – namely ‘viewings’, ‘visitations’ and ‘funeral services’ – that are performed in the UK and the US and which are, sometimes, globally referred to as ‘funeral’ and ‘wake’ as well. This distinction was necessary in order to clarify what Brazilian funerals are. Since *velórios*, which are an inseparable part of the triad that composes Brazilian funerals (*velório*, *cortejo*, *enterro* or *cremação*<sup>172</sup>) are the main theme of this thesis, a detailed description was included, in order to avoid confusion that can arise when the words ‘wake’ and ‘funeral’ are interchangeably used. After these distinctions were made, the reasons why Brazilian virtual wakes are called as such, and not as the similar services in the UK and the US, were laid out. This was covered in Chapter 1.

Chapter 2 dealt with the Methodologies adopted for conducting this study: historical analysis, induction and participant observation. It was only in Chapter 3 that the first of the three settings presented above, regarding how wakes were performed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was fully addressed. That chapter was dedicated to the death practices of that time in Brazil, mainly through the eyes of foreigners who visited the country and published their experiences there between 1805 and 1860. This period was important to this thesis to present the Brazilian context, in order to better understand current behaviours. It was found that Brazilian funerals, as a whole, were quite public then, pompous affairs whenever possible, that the presence of the community was greatly welcomed, for the presence of people would somehow aid the deceased in their journey to the afterlife. Catholic brotherhoods were mainly responsible for providing funeral arrangements.

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<sup>172</sup> Wake, cortège (or funeral procession), burial or cremation.

The second setting was addressed in Chapter 3 as well. This regarded new ways of thinking which were introduced in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when a sanitary reformation changed the way death and the dead were perceived; amongst other actions, the dead were removed from the bosom of society through the prohibition of church burials and the implementation of distant cemeteries. A significant result of these and other actions was that funerals became private affairs, while medical technology substituted religion in dealing with the dead. Brazilians were, however, quite reluctant in accepting these changes, which were met with a protest – the *Cemiterada* - in the city of Salvador, when a brand-new cemetery was completely destroyed by the population in an attempt to stop the prohibition on church burials. The chapter also addressed the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the *modus operandi* inaugurated in the previous century was finally established as a norm: funerary companies substituted religious brotherhoods, and the place for a wake was gradually moved out of the family home to a wake room or centre, especially in metropolises.

In order for the third and last setting to be fully explored, it was necessary to deal with the development of the Internet in Brazil, focusing on death-related uses. This was achieved in Chapters 4 and 5. Chapter 4 introduced the research field, *Profiles de Gente Morta*, when it was still a community on the social network Orkut.

Chapter 5 covered PGM's move to Facebook and its establishment there as a group, along with the new features which were introduced by the new platform. PGM members are still as interested in death as they were in previous times, but now they are feeding their interest via information that is readily available online, both via traditional and unofficial news sources, rather than through individuals.

Then, exactly how did those changes introduced in the 19<sup>th</sup> century allow *velórios* to be transformed into *velórios virtuais* in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Only in Chapter 6 this was completely uncovered. That chapter dealt exclusively with virtual wakes, highlighting that in Brazil they were introduced as an alternative to a real wake, envisioned to aid those who cannot attend the actual ritual in person. A virtual wake is then a development of the ritual within the Brazilian funeral triad which has been through the least amount of changes over time: the wake itself.

Since wakes are deeply embedded within Brazilian culture, it seems logical to have a virtual version, accompanying technological developments – which might seem like a paradox if compared to the resistance to other funerary developments in previous times. However, it is possible to say that Brazilians are now much more curious about new technologies than in previous centuries, but at the same time can be quite unwilling to change what they consider to be ‘traditional’. Therefore, the reason why virtual wakes have not yet been met with protests like the *Cemiterada* in the 19<sup>th</sup> century is because they are not law-enforced, and do not change wakes *per se*, or the place where wakes are supposed to occur. They are simply an optional addition, a service which may appeal to some.

In the questionnaire, it was revealed that PGM members either interact within the group, by discussing what they are seeing, sharing screenshots or personal experiences, or that those who choose to remain observers still indirectly interact with the deceased or/and their family through prayers, or through investigating the life story of the deceased. In either way, PGM members are acknowledging the deceased’s lives and the fact that they are now dead, which is mostly what a wake is about.

In this context, this work’s theoretical contribution to the field is its presentation of contemporary Brazilian funerals to the Global North; as such, this large-scale study was a good way to carry out this introduction, in an attempt to change paradigms about the country, for it remains such an understudied area. That is the main reason why the sets of data presented here, together with historical details and death practices, were important for this research, which was guided by three questions:

- 1) What are the reasons for PGM members to watch virtual wakes of strangers?
- 2) Is the discussion of death-related issues in the *Profiles de Gente Morta* group enabling an offline re-approximation with death in urban Brazil?
- 3) Is it possible to interpret PGM members’ behaviour as a reconstruction or a reconfiguration of the 19<sup>th</sup> century behaviour towards death in Brazil?

These questions were not answered in order. The first to be answered was question number two, with the findings presented in Chapters 4 and 5, which dealt with PGM on Orkut and on Facebook, respectively. The majority of Orkut-PGM users who answered polls related to their behaviour in the community agreed that their membership triggered them to think more about life and death, and to become more careful in their daily, offline life.

To establish a link between them and the behaviour found in the 1800's, Orkut could be seen as the 19<sup>th</sup> century of Internet in Brazil: people were very keen on interacting with strangers on a daily basis, messages and homages to the dead were more popular and public. Information was shared from individual to individual, celebrating the newfound liberation from the traditional press.

The majority of Facebook-PGM members who answered the questionnaire specifically created for this research, however, believe death is taboo in Brazil, and as though they have received criticism about their membership, the sole aspect of their membership sparking offline debates with their family and peers can be seen as a contribution to an offline re-approximation with death in urban Brazil. Therefore, in this context, this thesis has identified that social media does contribute to discussions around death and dying in Brazil, perhaps more online than offline, but is present in both scenarios.

Another aspect that was uncovered, or better yet, confirmed by this research, is that PGM members are not special; they are just regular people, interested in death rituals as many of us are. As the group talks about these issues openly, it has the potential to spark conversations in the real world. This in itself might be changing the way Brazilians view death and dying, one 'click' at a time. Only now, this change is being made individually rather than communally.

Facebook can then be seen as the 21<sup>st</sup> century of the Internet in Brazil: PGM members are more reserved and private; because of this, the number of condolences messages to strangers have considerably declined. The visiting of profiles continues, but it is more about observing than participating by sending messages, as it was on Orkut. This can also be understood as similar to the 19<sup>th</sup> century behaviour of visiting the deceased's home to pay their respects to the deceased during the wake, but not staying for the subsequent rituals (cortège and burial) that compose the Brazilian funeral.



The first question was only answered in Chapter 6, the last one in this thesis. If one looks strictly at the sets of data retrieved from a poll at Orkut-PGM and from the Facebook-PGM questionnaire, they show that watching virtual wakes of strangers could not be interpreted as a reconstruction of the 19<sup>th</sup> century behaviour of attending wakes; however, it can be considered as the reconfiguration of an old behaviour, carried out with new tools. Therefore, this work has identified that technology has been repurposed, and that social media does contribute to discussions around death and dying in Brazil.

From a superficial examination, it seemed like it was possible to interpret PGM members' behaviour as a reconstruction of the 19<sup>th</sup> century conduct towards death in Brazil. This is because many situations have arisen in the group throughout the years, with members claiming to be praying or keeping the dead company by watching their virtual wakes. But the data presented in this thesis does not sustain that empirical argument.

The data has actually shown that the driving force behind PGM members who watch virtual wakes of strangers is curiosity; apart from the foreigners who saw Brazilian death rituals in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as something curious, Brazilians themselves at that time saw nothing of the sort in their behaviour. Their actions were guided by religion, social expectations and a sense of communal duty. These do not seem to be the driving force for PGM members, as the questionnaire has shown.

The majority of PGM members have a religion, but the notion of social expectations when it comes to death in Brazil has been reduced considerably, being contained to a more private sphere. PGM members are simply curious about the shared experience of death and *velórios* and watch *velórios virtuais* because it is possible to do so, because the Internet allows them to be anonymously 'present' at a ritual which is generally considered private.

On the other hand, as this attendance at wakes of strangers can now be done virtually, it can also be understood as a reconfiguration of that behaviour. In this sense, technology is again responsible for shifting the way death and the dead are perceived. But this time, the Internet, rather than medical technologies, is enabling this shift. If the dead were something to be feared after the Sanitary Reformation in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century they have become a matter of curiosity.

The sense of communal duty in wishing someone a good passing, so common in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was also transformed: it is now reserved to those who have some sort of relationship either to the deceased or to their family. Now, curiosity around death in Brazil can be satiated from a distance: from a computer, from a camera. Those who are interested in death rituals, such as wakes, no longer have to rely on face to face interaction.

However, those who participated in funerals in the 19<sup>th</sup> century had a stronger sense of belonging to the community and in making the community know that an individual was actively being part of it, which is not true now. Participation of strangers in death rituals nowadays is completely elective, and the Internet has provided the option to do so even more privately. This exists because there is a certain sense of shame in doing what was once honourable and decent. But exactly because it is possible, virtual wakes and the Internet in general allow people who do not have this sense of community to partake in the same rituals.

In this sense, this research has showed that not only virtual wakes, but also (and mostly) social media might be contributing to shift the relationship between Brazilian society and death. They serve as platforms for broadening the conversation on death-related issues, providing the opportunity to gather different people around these subjects in a way that would not be possible offline.

Because Brazilians are so used to death imagery, as stated in the introduction to this thesis, the interaction between PGM members might really have a real-life impact, other than just remaining as an ordinary online discussion with no further repercussions. For, as PGM members believe, as addressed in Chapter 5, death could still be considered taboo in Brazil. Then, this online exposure to death, because it offers the possibility of debate which was not present through traditional media such as television and radio, really has the potential to contribute to the diminishing of the taboo, or the idea of a taboo, by making people think and share their point of view, as cyberspace is a platform for the dissemination of ideas and Brazilians adopt social media to “accommodate rapid change”, according to Spyer (2017, p.195).

Brazilians who are not aware of PGM or that open virtual wakes can be the target of such attention, when faced with the death of a loved one, can focus on the possibility of allowing distant friends and relatives to accompany the wake from their computers. To them, the idea of a virtual wake might seem like a very

good one, and this particular possibility, just by existing, already makes virtual wakes a good option for Brazilians in Brazil and all over the world, for whom a wake is, and will very likely continue to be, an extremely important ritual.

However, in a broader sense, this work is not just about Brazil; it is a cautionary work, an introduction as to how quickly the myriad of information contained on social media can disappear, which has been brought to light via the netnographic portion of the research: it offered a look into what should be done before it is all lost, as Orkut and other social network sites have disappeared with the passing of time and the development of new communication technologies, the time for Facebook to be established as a graveyard, before fading out, can be fast approaching. Younger generations are now preferring other platforms and Facebook is being seen as an outdated social network site.

As, during the 19th century, participation in Brazilian funerals depended fundamentally on physical co-presence, their 21<sup>st</sup> century, virtual counterpart can be considered as different, but with a few similar aspects, such as the praying for the deceased, or the idea that one is keeping the deceased company by watching their virtual wake while no-one is physically present. There is also the similarity of the social duty in acknowledging the death of a fellow human, even if just by watching their wake on a computer screen.

This is one of the reasons why this study can also be seen as a microcosm of death, the Internet and the broader use of technology in death-related instances: talking about death is something people all over the world, not just Brazilians, want to use the Internet for. What was presented here is illustrative of what is already happening, and will continue to happen globally, when death and social media are combined. Because of this, in the future, similar studies can be used in different countries with the intention to document different online social networking habits related to death and dying.

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